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**Teachers' Perceptions of Barriers, Strategies, and Professional Development in Addressing
Reading Deficiencies Displayed by Struggling Pre-Kindergarten—Second Grade Readers**

by

Melissa J. Tellinghuisen

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty

of St. Cloud State University

in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree

Doctor of Education

in Educational Administration and Leadership

October, 2016

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Abstract

The purpose of the study was focused on examining perceptions of a sample of primary level rural Minnesota teachers of the common reading deficiencies displayed by struggling preschool through second grade readers, barriers experienced in delivering reading instruction to struggling readers, and strategies determined to be most effective in addressing reading deficiencies displayed by struggling readers. Furthermore, the study examined the types of staff development Minnesota teachers and their principals identified as most valuable in addressing reading deficiencies among preschool through second grade students.

The study employed a mixed methodology, which included the use of a closed-ended response survey and interviews. According to Morse (2005), “mixed method research consists of designs that are either primarily qualitative or quantitative and that incorporate strategies of the other method (either qualitative or quantitative) into the same research project” (p. 583).

The main conclusions from this study supports existing research. Research supports the necessity to identify struggling readers early in their literacy development. Flynn, Zheng, and Swanson (2012) stated, “it is widely known that early intervention is the key component to remediating reading difficulties, as well as, decreasing the risk of future reading acquisition problems” (p. 21).

The study of *Teachers’ Perceptions of Barriers, Strategies, and Professional Development in Addressing Reading Deficiencies Displayed by Struggling Pre-Kindergarten-Second Grade Readers* supports the need for early identification of literacy deficiencies displayed by struggling readers. It also supports the need for identifying perceived barriers impacting the delivery of quality instruction, teaching strategies to address reading deficiencies of struggling readers, and available professional development or related reading strategies to improve literacy instruction.

Acknowledgments

Throughout the doctoral program, I was told to “enjoy the journey.” My journey was not done in isolation and I have many people to thank that have helped along the way. A special thank you to my St. Cloud State University advisor and mentor throughout this journey, Dr. Roger Worner. Without your encouragement, deadlines, thought provoking questions, and constant pressure to dig deeper, I would not have produced such a quality dissertation. A special thank you to the rest of my committee members at St. Cloud State University, Dr. Kay Worner, Dr. Janine Dahms-Walker, and Dr. Plamen Miltenoff. Words cannot express the gratitude I have for each of you as you assisted me along my journey.

I would also like to thank my Milaca Elementary School mentors, Mr. Steve Voshell and Mr. Jeff Meyer. Without your guidance to become a teacher leader, your examples of quality administrative leadership, your assistance to help me see the bigger picture, or the many laughs, the journey wouldn't have been as enjoyable.

Most importantly, I would like to thank my family as they make me complete. Thank you to my dad, Roger, for your unwavering support to be the best that I can be, to learn from every mishap, and for teaching me the importance of a quality education. Thank you to my mom, Pat, for your belief that I would succeed, the straightforward words of encouragement when I wasn't sure I would finish, and the endless freezer meals you made me throughout the writing process. Thank you to my brother, Mike, for always being a quiet supporter and often reminding me how lucky I am to have a job that I love. Thank you to my sister and brother-in-law, Makayla and Justin, for encouraging me to take breaks from writing to enjoy family and for making me step away from my research to laugh. And thank you to my niece, Emily. Seeing your constant smile, hearing your delightful laugh, and seeing the joy you bring to so many is a

constant reminder that nothing is more important than the love of a family. Together you have all endured my rigorous work, school, research, and writing schedule. You have not only accepted my commitment to finishing my dissertation, but have encouraged me to do my very best. For all of these reasons, I am one lucky person and am truly thankful.

Thank you to all the study participants who were involved in this study. I learned so much throughout the entire process. And finally, I would like to thank my friends in cohort VI for your shared knowledge and your experience. I would especially like to thank Christopher Hanson, Emily Rustman, Nicole Rittenour, Carissa Ranschau, and Joel Traver for providing humorous breaks from writing and ensuring that I didn't take myself too seriously, all of which helped me along my journey.

Table of Contents

	Page
List of Tables	8
Chapter	
I. Introduction of the Study	9
Background of the Problem	9
Statement of the Problem.....	10
Purpose of the Study	11
Research Questions	12
Significance of the Study	13
Limitations of the Study.....	13
Definition of Key Terms	14
II. Review of Literature	16
Characteristics of a Struggling Reader in Grades PreK-2	20
Teaching Barriers in the Classroom.....	23
Literacy Strategies for Struggling Readers	25
Administrative Support and Professional Development.....	31
III. Methodology	38
Background Information to the Study.....	38
A Brief Overview of the Literature Related to Struggling Readers.....	38
Statement of the Problem.....	39
Purpose of the Study	40

	6
Research Questions	41
Research Design.....	41
Participants.....	43
Human Subjects Approval	44
Instrument Design	44
Procedures for Data Collection and Analysis	45
Assumptions of the Study	48
Summary	48
IV. Results.....	50
Research Methods	50
Analysis.....	52
Description of the Sample.....	52
Demographics	53
Research Question 1	54
Research Question 2	56
Research Question 3	60
Research Question 4	63
V. Summary, Conclusions, and Recommendations.....	69
Delimitations of the Study	70
Research Question 1	71
Research Question 2	71
Research Question 3	72

	7
Research Question 4	73
Recommendations for Professional Practice	74
Recommendations for Further Study	75
Conclusion	76
References	78
Appendices	
A. Survey	85
B. Request Letter to Preschool-Second Grade Teachers and Principals	96
C. Interview Questions	97

List of Tables

Table	Page
1. Demographics of Participants	54
2. Teachers' Reported Reading Deficiencies Displayed by Struggling Readers.....	55
3. Teachers' Reported Belief of How the Provided Barrier Impacts Instruction.....	58
4. Teachers' Reported Values of Teaching Strategies	61
5. Professional Development Strategies Most Valuable in Addressing Reading Deficiencies.....	64

Chapter I: Introduction of the Study

Background of the Problem

Children who struggle to read may have difficulties with some or all aspects of the literacy process at any time throughout their literacy development (Bomer & Bomer, 2001). Zimmerman, Padak, and Rasinski (as cited in Dowell, Bickmore, & Hoewing, 2012) suggested that “knowing how to read establishes the foundation for successful school experiences” (p. 8).

Duffy (2005) stated, “responding effectively to the increasingly complex demands placed on school systems requires change leadership to transform entire school systems, not pieces of the school system” (p. 15).

The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB, public law 107-110) required that all students demonstrate continuous and substantial progress towards academic proficiency (Rudalevige, 2003). The Act required that students in grades three through eighth and in high school be administered annual tests in both reading and mathematics (Guilfoyle, 2006). Hanushek (2009) stated that “all states had to develop learning standards and assessments of student performance” (p. 802), and all schools were required, by 2014, to be on a path towards proficiency in reading, mathematics, and science (Hanushek, 2009). If students in a school failed to reach proficiency, the school was expected to provide supplemental educational opportunities along with public school choice (Guilfoyle, 2006). Significant responsibilities were placed on leaders to guide school districts toward this desirable outcome (Duffy, 2005).

According to Rudalevige (2003), “President George W. Bush declared the start of a “new era” in American public education with the signing of the No Child Left Behind Act” (p. 63). No Child Left Behind was an inspired result of a report issued during the Reagan administration in

1983, *A Nation at Risk* (Rudalevige, 2003) in which Gardner stated that “. . . the educational foundations of our society are presently being eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our very future as a nation and a people” (p. 3).

To address some of the apparent issues that NCLB created and to put his new administrative values into place, President Barack Obama initiated Race to the Top (RTT). Under RTT, when student achievement increased, even if adequate yearly progress was not met, schools benefited (Apple, 2011). Race to the Top increased school accountability (Onosko, 2011). Both NCLB and RTT emphasized focus on increasing student performances in reading and mathematics and reducing the achievement gap.

The emphasis on reading (i.e. literacy) is not without merits. Urdike and Freeze (2001) argued that “literacy can be considered the most functional skill in society” (p. 15). Although many would corroborate this statement, literacy is also one of the most complex skills taught to children. Researchers agree that the ability to read is of utmost importance for the success of children (Mahdavi & Tensfeldt, 2013; Urdike & Freeze, 2001;). Unfortunately, over the years, student growth shown in reading has not been as significant as student growth shown in mathematics (Ravitch, 2013).

Ankrum and Bean (2008) believed that “children have always come to school with a range of literacy experiences and abilities, and teachers have struggled for years to meet the needs of *all* of their learners” (p. 134).

Statement of the Problem

Reading skills are a foundational and important part of the educational efforts. The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act required that all public school students make adequate yearly

progress in reading; ultimately obtaining 100% literacy proficiency (Yell, Katsiyannas, & Shiner, 2006). However, in preschool through second grade, large numbers of students struggle to acquire the developmentally appropriate reading skills (Moats, 1999). Alarming, according to Bos, Mather, Dickson, Podhajski, and Chard (2001), “approximately 75% of the children who struggle with reading in third grade will still be poor readers at the end of high school” (p. 98).

Johnson and Keier (2010) asserted, because each struggling reader can encounter difficulties with one or more developmentally appropriate pre-reading skill, classroom teachers are challenged to identify research-based intervention strategies that have been proven to be successful in primary level classrooms when they stated, “we must remain responsive to the needs of each child, making sure we are linking what they already know to new learning” (p. 110).

Kelly and Campbell (2008) identified the four most common reasons children struggle with reading include (a) lack of life experiences and role models, (b) difficulty with phonics and comprehension, (c) visual processing issues, and (d) learning disabilities. From the top level of government to the classroom, helping struggling students to read has been, and should continue to be, an important goal of teachers and administrators.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study focused on examining the perceptions of a select sample of primary level rural Minnesota teachers regarding common reading deficiencies displayed by preschool through second grade students struggling with reading.

Kelly and Campbell (2008) defined struggling readers as “readers who display reading skills deficiencies because of lack of life experiences, lack of role models, difficulty with phonics and comprehension, visual processing issues, or learning disabilities” (p. 1).

In addition, the study focused on participating teachers identifying the barriers they experienced in delivering reading instruction to struggling readers, and strategies determined to be most effective in addressing reading deficiencies displayed by struggling students. Finally, the study focused on examining the types of staff development topics Minnesota teachers and their principals identified as most valuable in addressing reading deficiencies displayed by preschool through second grade students.

The results of the study are intended to aid school district administrators and university professors in the training and development of principals expanding their knowledge about reading intervention strategies.

Research Questions

1. What did a select sample of rural Minnesota primary level school teachers identify as reading deficiencies displayed by struggling PreK-2 students?
2. What teaching barriers did a select sample of rural Minnesota primary level school teachers experience in delivering reading instruction to struggling PreK-2 students?
3. What teaching strategies did a select sample of rural Minnesota primary level school teachers identify as most effective in addressing reading deficiencies displayed by struggling PreK-2 students?
4. What types of professional development strategies did a select sample of rural PreK-2 Minnesota primary level school teachers and their principals identify as most valuable

in assisting primary level teachers in addressing reading deficiencies experienced by struggling students?

Significance of the Study

Findings from the study have the potential to impact Minnesota educational leaders - including administrative teams, curriculum directors, subject matter specialists, and university professors involved in teacher development and principal training programs in Minnesota. Increasing the emphasis on research-based reading interventions and focusing on and strengthening reading specific staff development programming, the potential for narrowing the literacy achievement gap among students is great.

Results from the study may be useful to Minnesota principals in their delivery of new teacher reading (literacy) training, planning professional development in-service for primary level school teachers, and implementing new reading curricula.

In the areas of continual professional growth and development, the results of the study may be instructive on the relationship between the principal as the literacy (reading) coach and the teacher as a change agent. Kral (2012) stated that “teachers need to know that the principal is learning along with them, or is at least very involved in their learning” (p. 1). Kral further elaborated that “as instructional leaders, administrators should be seen doing the work they expect others to do” (p. 2). The results from the study may encourage principals to strengthen current practices in literacy training and staff development.

Limitations of the Study

Limitations are conditions over which the researcher has no control (Roberts, 2010). The limitations of the study included:

- The rate with which selected Minnesota preschool through second-grade teachers and their principals chose to participate in responding to the study survey.
- The information gained from the study was based upon what the participants reported.
- The researcher utilized a convenience sample, and study respondents may have completed (or not completed) study survey due to knowing the researcher.
- The survey involved self-reporting.
- The study was limited to select preschool through second-grade teachers and their principals in rural Minnesota.
- The time in the school year may have impacted study respondents' ability or willingness to participate in the study.

Definition of Key Terms

Developmentally Appropriate. "Making curriculum, lesson, and other decisions that affect students based on what they are able to do cognitively, physically and emotionally at a certain age" (Morin, n.d., p. 1).

Intervention. "Designed to teach or improve a skill or to adjust the environment in which the skill should be present" (Malouf, Reisener, Gadke, Wimbish, & Frankel, 2014, p. 270).

Literacy Skills. "Skills needed for reading and writing, including sound awareness, relationship between letters and sounds, vocabulary, comprehension, and spelling" (Bainbridge, n.d., p. 1). For the purposes of this study, the term literacy will only refer to the skills needed for reading.

No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). NCLB requires that all public school students make adequate yearly progress in reading; ultimately obtaining 100% literacy proficiency (Yell et al., 2006).

Prekindergarten. For the purposes of this study, prekindergarten and preschool are used interchangeably.

Preschool Age. A term to describe children between the ages of 3 and 6 (Bodrova & Leong, 2003, p. 157).

Principal. The chief executive officer of a school. For the purposes of this study, principal refers to principal, assistant principal, or vice principal.

Race to the Top (RTT). Educational reform enacted by President Barack Obama that offered “funding to states if high quality standards were created among states, rigorous assessments were administered to students, student academic growth was considered in evaluations, consistent low-performing schools were identified, and alternative teacher and principal certification were provided” (DuFour, 2015, pp. 7-8).

Rural Area. The term “rural area” is defined under § 343(a) of the Consolidated Farm and Rural Development Act, which specifies “a rural area is not a city or town that has a population of more than 50,000, or an urbanized area contiguous and adjacent to a city or town of 50,000 or more; therefore, all other areas are rural areas” (Sheppard, 2004, p. 1).

Struggling Readers. “Readers who display reading skill deficiencies because of lack of life experiences, lack of role models, difficulty with phonics and comprehension, visual processing issues, or learning disabilities” (Kelly & Campbell, 2008, p. 1).

Chapter II: Review of Literature

The review of literature illustrates the following themes: (a) research-based characteristics of struggling readers in preschool through second grade, (b) barriers faced by classroom teachers while instructing struggling readers, (c) successful literacy strategies and interventions employed by classroom teachers in assisting struggling readers, and (d) classroom support through collaboration with administrative staff and professional development.

Learning to read is a complex process that requires time to practice and apply foundational literacy skills. Literacy skills must be practiced and applied to build the reader's fluency and to build confidence as a reader. It [learning how to read fluently] is a necessity for a successful life (Mahdavi & Tensfeldt, 2013; Updike & Freeze, 2001;).

As children begin to learn how to read, poor readers are not less intelligent or less motivated (Moats, 1999). Poor readers may struggle with many aspects of the reading process including decoding and comprehending what is read (McMaster, Espin, & Broek, 2014). Reading inequities can be attributed to individual backgrounds of each child. Not all children begin school with similar literacy backgrounds or foundational literacy experiences. Some children begin school with literacy rich backgrounds, immersed in print while other students come from backgrounds with little to no experience with printed word. An achievement gap starts long before the first day of school. Achievement gaps begin at birth (Ravitch, 2013). Kelly and Campbell (2008) stated that "the four most common causes of underachievement in reading include (a) reading role models and life experiences, (b) the acquisition of reading skills, specifically phonics and comprehension, (c) visual processing, and (d) learning disabilities" (p. 1).

Welch and White (1999) asserted that “schools bear the readiness burden of being prepared to work with all children, at their current level of skills, as they arrive at the door” (p. 8). Students without the emergent literacy skills at the beginning of their educational journey, are often the children who require extra support in school throughout his or her literacy development. These supports provide opportunities for a successful future that would otherwise be unattainable (Malouf et al., 2014).

Within the elementary school, classroom teachers assume the importance of teaching children how to read (Mather, Bos, & Babur, 2001). Often, when a child struggles with mastering literacy skills, the achievement gap widens. The achievement gap continues to grow as students struggling to read have greater literacy foundational skills to learn than their peers (Bomer & Bomer, 2001). Successful literacy mastery is essential in preparing children for an ever-changing world (Massey, 2012).

Preparing children for the transformations of the world also requires that universities, specifically teacher preparation programs, become adequately prepared to teach in literacy diverse classrooms. Teaching young learners is an important task. Teacher candidates need to have opportunities to be immersed in diverse literacy situations prior to entering the profession. These opportunities are of utmost importance, because unfortunately, teaching is often criticized and under constant scrutiny by fellow educators, researchers, and policymakers (Wold, Young, & Risko, 2011). Future educators need to be strong, diligent, and more prepared than previous generations of educators. Caprano, Capraro, Capraro, and Helfeldt, (2010) stated that:

Following the challenge issued by Zeichner (1999), ‘there is no more important responsibility for a school, college, department, or faculty of education than to do the best

job that it possibly can in preparing teachers to teach in schools of our nation and to support the learning of teachers throughout their careers. If we are not prepared to take this responsibility more seriously and do all that we can to have the best possible teacher education programs, then we should let someone else do the job (p. 13).’ (p. 139)

O’Neill and Geoghegan (2011) argued that “this need to improve literacy teaching and learning impacts directly on the work of the universities, schools and school improvement processes. They need to address changing student populations, linguistic and cultural diversity, new technologies and different learning modalities” (p. 188). Goldhaber and Cowan (2014) stated that “a number of recent articles have reached divergent conclusions about the importance of teacher preparation programs as a predictor of teacher effects on the test scores of their students” (p. 449). For literacy instruction and research-based interventions to be successful, it is crucial that literacy teachers have a basic understanding of literacy and its importance in education (Beck, Kosnik, & Rowsell, 2007; Spear-Swerling & Zibulsky, 2014).

As complex as literacy development can be for each individual child, adding to the complexity are the experiences and literacy background knowledge of each classroom teacher. Often dependent upon teacher manuals as a guide, inexperienced literacy teachers struggle to understand the complexities of teaching children how to read (Moats, 1999). Decades of research has concluded that nearly half of the public school teachers in the United States are inexperienced with limited literacy knowledge (Clark, Jones, Reutzel, & Andreasen, 2013; Mather et al., 2001).

Liston, Whitcomb, and Borko (2006) argued that “unlike experienced teachers, new teachers typically have not yet honed efficient and consistent approaches to routine tasks so that they can focus their attention on matters more deserving; thus, every aspect of a teacher’s workload is time-consuming and cumulatively, it is exhausting” (p. 353). Recognizing the

diverse student population, complexities of literacy instruction, and the time commitment of planning for each individual child, retention of quality instructors has become an issue. These challenging conditions, along with the expectation that novice literacy instructors must learn from experience, are contributing factors to declining retention rates among teachers.

A decline in teacher retention is expensive. In addition, it is also a detriment to the teaching profession as the quality of literacy instruction is compromised. Darling-Hammond, Chung, and Frelow (2002) believed that “some evidence suggests that in the long run, the greater entry and retention rates of well-prepared teachers may actually save money over the costs of hiring, inducting, and replacing underprepared recruits who leave at high rates” (p. 297).

The costs incurred by the school district are not always monetary costs. Hanushek, Kain, and Rivkin (1998) found that after the second year of teaching, effectiveness of a new teacher increases dramatically. When novice teachers leave the teaching profession prior to their second year of teaching, it can negatively influence the effectiveness of literacy instruction.

Additional significance to the workload of novice teachers, Valencia, Place, Martin, and Grossman (2006) asserted that new teachers “. . . will face the most diverse group of students in history, and they are likely to find themselves teaching in high-poverty, low-achieving schools ” (p. 94). Teacher candidates should be placed in classrooms with diverse learning needs to help prepare the candidate for his or her future classroom (Helfrich & Bean, 2011). Socio-economic status of the student along with teaching in low-achieving school districts can create obstacles for new teachers and often supersede a new teacher’s ability to adequately teach students how to read.

Learning to read can be complex, difficult, and overwhelming for a significant number of young children. The review of literature illustrates the following themes (a) research-based characteristics of struggling readers in preschool through second grade, (b) barriers faced by classroom teachers while instructing struggling readers, (c) successful literacy strategies and interventions employed by classroom teachers in assisting struggling readers, and (d) classroom support through collaboration with administrative staff and professional development. Teaching students to read is a crucial skill. Hattie (2008) asserted that:

. . . if students do not develop sufficient reading acumen by the middle of elementary school, they are handicapped from learning in other curricula—as it does not take long in schooling to move from learning to read to reading to learn. (p. 129).

Characteristics of a Struggling Reader in Grades PreK-2

Children who struggle to read can intermittently struggle with any or all aspects of the literacy process (Bomer & Bomer, 2001). Researchers agreed that learning to read is a precursor to success in school and in life (Dowell et al., 2012; Moats, 1999).

Literacy fluency is a skill that matures over time and as a child progresses through stages of development. Mather et al. (2001) asserted that “unfortunately, children who do poorly at reading in first and second grade tend to remain poor readers throughout school, with a substantial proportion eventually identified as students with learning disabilities” (p. 472). In 1988, Juel presented the notion that there is about a 90% chance for children to remain poor readers if they fail in first grade. Chard and Kameenui (2000) confirmed Juel (1998), thus establishing a tendency and further raising the importance of the issue.

Hatcher, Nuner, and Paulsel (2012) stated that “the increased academic demands of kindergarten (Goldstein, 2007) resulted in expectations that preschool children will enter

kindergarten having some familiarity with print, letter and sound recognition, and beginning writing skills” (p. 2). As the desire for foundational literacy knowledge entering kindergarten increases, the achievement gap widens between and among children.

Relying heavily on context clues is often a strategy employed by new and struggling readers. When struggling readers are presented with an unfamiliar word, they rely heavily on picture clues to gather the meaning of the word (Pressley & Allington, 2014). As children progress through the stages of literacy development, there is a gradual transition from intense picture cues to a heavier focus on print. As the child is promoted from grade to grade, relying on context clues becomes increasingly difficult for the student to utilize as a reading strategy.

Not surprisingly, children who struggle to sound out words and read fluently, also struggle with reading comprehension (Mather et al., 2001). The laborious task of decoding often prevents the struggling reader from making connections throughout the text, which in turn interrupts the ability to comprehend. Comprehension is a key component of effective literacy development. Children must gain meaning from printed material.

Children can struggle with any aspect of reading. Combining the components of literacy is difficult to do and to understand for struggling readers, thus decreasing their ability to read fluently (Johnson & Keier, 2010). Children struggling to read become accustomed to a less than satisfactory experience while reading. They have not experienced the same joys while reading as a fluent reader. McMaster, Espin, and Broek (2014) stated that “poor readers often have lower standards of coherence. That is, during reading, they are more easily satisfied with a less-than coherent depiction of the text, so they devote less attention and energy to the processes required to build a coherent representation” (p. 19).

However, reading struggles can be prevented with quality instruction and early identification (Moats, 1999). Identification of struggling readers can be monitored and determined by evaluating academic progress on various standardized and non-standardized assessments.

It is vital for teachers to understand each child's literacy deficiency so adequate interventions can be administered. According to Moats (1999), "research indicates that, although some children will learn to read in spite of incidental teaching, others never learn unless they are taught in an organized, systematic, efficient way by a knowledgeable teacher using a well-designed instructional approach" (p. 7). Early identification of struggling readers in preschool through second grade can be a difficult task for a teacher. Deciphering whether a child is a struggling reader because more time is needed to develop a literacy skill or whether a child is a struggling reader because of circumstances in the home is an overwhelming task. Darling-Hammond (2010) contended that schools in the United States have a difficult obligation. Schools must educate youth and, in addition, they must help families with meals, constant home evictions, loss or inadequate health care, and untreated mental illnesses.

Children enter classrooms with diverse literacy backgrounds; therefore, teacher attitudes and perceptions are important to the success of every child. Vlach and Burcie (2010) stated that "before engaging with a struggling reader-or any reader-it is imperative that a teacher believes that *every* child can learn and can contribute to the learning community" (p. 522). Alvermann (2003) believed that "the potency of one's beliefs about the self is phenomenal" (p. 4).

Literacy interventions can ensure that the child can begin his or her foundation for reading with success. Moats (1999) believed that "once behind in reading, few children catch up

unless they receive intensive, individual, and expert instruction, a scarce (and expensive) commodity in most schools” (p. 9). Unfortunately, the classroom teacher experiences several teaching barriers while trying to teach student how to read fluently.

Teaching Barriers in the Classroom

Teaching children how to read fluently can be challenging for the teacher, but it is a crucial skill for narrowing the achievement gap among students in the classroom. Teachers experience several teaching barriers while cultivating a classroom of fluent readers. Some of the barriers include, but are not limited to, a shift in home dynamic, diverse student literacy needs, limited literacy resources, limited literacy backgrounds of the teacher, and student avoidance.

One of the greatest and most challenging teaching barriers can arguably be teaching children how to read fluently. Teaching is not for amateurs (Moats, 1999). Primary teachers are believed to be responsible for introducing children to reading, however, as home dynamics shift (i.e. single parent households, dual income earning parents, inexperienced parents), teaching children to read fluently has become the responsibility of all teachers, support staff, and administrators.

Meeting the needs of all learners in the classroom is a challenge teachers face every year, and sometimes daily. Teachers are often expected to meet the diverse needs of the students without additional resources (Cobb, 2004). Because of this reason, teachers have historically struggled to meet the needs of all learners in the classroom (Ankrum & Bean, 2008). Bauml (2011) believed that “what teachers do in the classroom can make or break students’ chances for learning; therefore, teacher educators must strive to promote knowledge, skills, and dispositions for effective practice that can reach every child” (p. 225).

To close the gap between personal needs of students and their literacy needs, literacy teachers need to be creative. Literacy teachers must look outside their own background experiences to adequately reach all learners in the classroom. Maloch et al. (2003) stated that, “exemplary literacy teachers negotiate and integrate school expectations with the needs of the children (Duffy, 2002; Morrow, Tracey, Woo, & Pressley, 1999; Pressley, Rankin, & Yokoi, 1996; Wharton-McDonald et al., 1998)” (p. 452). The exemplary literacy teachers explore and integrate additional resources into the classroom to ensure quality literacy instruction. They look beyond their personal literacy background to best meet the needs of each individual learner.

Avoidance is a common literacy barrier faced by teachers. It is difficult for teachers to provide additional literacy practice in the classroom because it is often a task disliked and avoided by a struggling reader (Updike & Freeze, 2001). Providing the much-needed practice time to struggling readers who subsequently avoid reading can be frustrating. Struggling readers do not see reading as an enjoyable experience and, therefore, prefer to circumvent additional time engaged in the practice.

Overcoming literacy barriers in the classroom can be a monotonous task for classroom teachers as each school year presents a new set of student struggles. To overcome these barriers, effective teachers are leaders seeking strategies to improve their instructional practice by using student assessment results to adjust instructional practices (Maloch et al., 2003). Teachers are continuously striving to develop effective teaching strategies and literacy interventions to increase reading fluency. Verbalizing the steps involved in reading is one of the several literacy strategies employed by the classroom teacher to support struggling readers (Johnson & Keier, 2010).

Literacy Strategies for Struggling Readers

Research, observation, and professional development opportunities provide successful literacy strategies for teachers to assist struggling readers. For decades, researchers have found the importance of early identification of struggling readers, differentiating instruction using research based instructional practices, providing educational opportunities for parents, and continuous professional development for teachers (Sanzo, Clayton, & Sherman, 2011; Washburn, Joshi, & Cantrell, 2011).

Literacy teachers implement strategies to adequately assist struggling readers in the classroom. Research supports their early identification of struggling readers, providing a tiered level of support to students, and consciously choosing student centered interventions. Literacy teachers seek administrative support to assist with struggling readers and actively engage parents in their child's literacy development.

Research supports the necessity to identify struggling readers early in their literacy development. Flynn, Zheng, and Swanson (2012) stated that "it is widely known that early intervention is the key component to remediating reading difficulties, as well as, decreasing the risk of future reading acquisition problems" (p. 21). Taylor (2004) asserted that "the experience of developing, implementing, and evaluating a successful literacy intervention, it is clear that literacy leaders believe that each student can become independent, joyful readers and writers" (p. 27). Teaching struggling readers can be arduous. Early identification of a struggling reader is imperative, but can prove to be difficult. Not all struggling readers have difficulties with the same literacy concepts which often proves to be a barrier for classroom teachers. Johnson and Keier (2010) stated that "if struggling readers are not learning how to read, then we need to look

at ourselves and our teaching, searching harder and longer to discover how to teach them better” (p. 11). Implementation of successful research based interventions have assisted students who struggle to overcome the challenging task of reading.

Manifestation of a belief in each individual child in the classroom can be one of the best and underutilized reading intervention strategies available.

Allington (2002) stated:

Good teachers, effective teachers, matter much more than particular curriculum materials, pedagogical approaches, or “proven programs.” It has become clearer that investing in good teaching - whether through making sound hiring decisions or planning effective professional development - is the most “research-based” strategy available. (p. 740)

The role of the classroom teacher is pivotal when implementing a successful intervention strategy with a struggling reader. Effective teachers take the time to develop successful assessment strategies and allow themselves instructional flexibility. Assessment data drives classroom instruction. Powers, Zippay, and Butler (2006) believed that “effective teachers understand the interplay between instruction and assessment and consistently plan instruction based on classroom assessment results (Afflerback & Moni, 1996; Hiebert & Calfee, 1989)” (p. 122). Rupley, Blair, and Nichols (2009) declared that “successful teachers, teachers whose students consistently outperform their peers, rely on instructional flexibility so they can provide explicit instruction to struggling learners who need the additional modeling and support (Villaume & Brabham, 2003)” (p. 126). Working with struggling students one-to-one is more effective than whole group instruction (Chapman & Tunmer, 2011).

Skilled teachers understand that knowing each student as an individual and as a reader, greatly assists in literacy intervention selection (Compton-Lilly, 2009). For a classroom teacher to be effective in this strategy, he or she must make an effort to learn about each student. The

classroom teacher must know each student's reading proficiency as the instruction should focus on the strengths and needs of each student (Ankrum & Bean, 2008). In addition, the teacher should know each student as an individual. The teacher should inquire about personal interests to help assist in the literacy learning process. The teacher should organize classroom libraries or book selections based on student interests. Competent teachers are also aware of and utilize individual student strengths. Fives et al. (2014) stated that “. . . if children feel more competent in a task they are more likely to value it over time (Eccles et al., 1983)” (p. 216).

Adoniou (2013) stated:

Kusmic's (1994) description of quality teachers is an appealing one, they are teachers who 'carefully consider the content of what is taught to children, are active in developing original curriculum based on their own and or their pupils' interests and are able to creatively use materials, personal talents and innovative resources in planning and implementing learning activities (Kusmic, 1994, p. 16).' (p. 3)

When assisting struggling readers, a tiered level of support is recommended. Starting with immense amounts of teacher support in the beginning and gradually releasing to independence (Pikulski, 1996). As stated in the research, at the beginning of literacy development or at the beginning of a new literacy intervention strategy, a teacher must provide an exuberant amount of support and modeling. As the student becomes more proficient, the teacher gradually releases responsibility to the student. Ideally, the teacher releases all control to the student at skill mastery.

For decades, researchers have supported the importance of early literacy intervention by skilled teachers (Juel, 1988; Mather et al., 2001). Interventions improve a skill (Malouf et al., 2014). Deciphering the most appropriate intervention to use with each student can be difficult. Ideally, teachers select an individual intervention based on the need of the child and not one

based on teacher preference. An inappropriate approach to intervention selection is to choose one based on teacher familiarity or ease (Malouf et al., 2014).

Modeling is a successful intervention that has been used with struggling readers. Malouf et al., (2014) stated that “modeling involves showing a student the correct way to complete a skill” (p. 270). When modeling a specific literacy skill, it is important that the teacher model correctly the first time. Correct and consistent modeling reinforces the expectation for the students, especially to struggling readers.

Providing real world examples to struggling readers is also an effective literacy strategy. Mather et al. (2001) stated that “children who continue to fail at reading require instructional approaches that focus on phonemic awareness, phonic skills, and the application of these skills to real words in texts (O’Connor, 2000; Torgesten, 2000; Vellutino, et al., 1996)” (p. 472). Introducing struggling readers to these skills in real world examples helps solidify the necessity to become a fluent reader. It is a strategy that not only peaks reader interest, but also provides opportunities to practice with real world examples.

The older a struggling student, the more difficult it is to design an effective literacy program (Hoover & Fabian, 2000). The difficulty in determining an appropriate literacy intervention as the child ages may be exacerbated by the nonchalant attitude of the struggling reader. Struggling older readers are cognizant that their struggle to read is greater than that of their peers. Older struggling readers have developed avoidance techniques to cope with their inability to read fluently (Taylor, 2004). Working on intervention strategies with the teacher or support staff becomes embarrassing. Task avoidance to reading is a behavior that is often observed. Early literacy intervention is imperative.

Offering corrective feedback as an intervention strategy ensures that the student acquires the target skill and does not practice errors (Burns, Riley-Tillman, & VanDerHeyden, 2012). By providing immediate, positive, and corrective feedback, the teacher is helping the student create successful reading behaviors. The student is unable to practice errors, turning them into habits, when immediate corrective feedback is given. As the student transitions through all levels of reading, the teacher must know the appropriate times to infuse immediate corrective feedback. At the emergent and acquisition stages, immediate corrective feedback must be given to deflect practicing incorrect literacy skills. However, at the fluency stage, immediate corrective feedback may not be the most appropriate intervention as it interferes with the reader's comprehension. When a child is building fluency, or in the fluency stage of reading development, interruptions are counterproductive because student interferes with the student's opportunities to read (Burns et al., 2012).

A teacher must provide the student with literacy strategies at all levels of literacy development to help him or her increase the level of comprehension. Taylor (2004) stated that "when all teachers teach, model, and support students in practicing before-reading, during-reading, and after-reading strategies the students deepen knowledge, develop greater vocabularies, and increase reading comprehension" (p. 28). However, reading strategies alone do not make a fluent reader. Opportunities to practice reading strategies is crucial (Taylor, 2004). Children must be given opportunities to practice reading strategies in a safe environment. Children need to be able to deepen their strategy development by participating in classroom discussions. Effective teachers know that good readers do more than read words on a page. Effective teachers know that to help students become good readers, they need to model "think

alouds” while reading. Effective reading teachers need to encourage readers to listen, respond, and be reflective on their reading (Taylor, 2004).

Parent involvement and parent education have been proven to be an effective intervention strategy. To increase literacy achievement, a strong connection between home and school must be maintained (Massey, 2012). Parent expectations and encouragement are integral parts in the literacy development of a child (Hattie, 2008). Educators must create a strong, respected, and mutually beneficial working relationship with all parents, but most importantly with parents of struggling readers. This can be difficult as many parents struggle understanding the language used in the classroom (Hattie, 2008).

Parent involvement, as a term, is often overly simplified. In some school districts, educators cannot keep up with the parent demand for involvement opportunities. However, some school districts are in very low, socio-economic communities. Thus, parent involvement activities provided by the teachers receive little or no parent attendance. Parent education opportunities provided by individual classroom teachers often have no guarantee that the material made it home to the parents. In this later example, it is a struggle for educators to find ways to increase and prolong parent involvement. It is often a struggle to find a group of parents who are able to actively promote involvement in the school. Because of these difficulties, teachers need to communicate with parents about the importance of expressing academic ambitions for their child. According to Hattie (2008), “across all home variables, parental aspirations and expectations for children’s educational achievement has the strongest relationship with achievement ($d=0.80$) . . . ” (p. 70).

Researchers agreed that creating and maintaining a cooperative relationship between school and home is essential to the success of the student (Ganske, Monroe, & Strickland, 2003; Pikulski, 1996). When students observe the school and their parents working on a common goal to increase his or her literacy fluency, it solidifies the importance. Teachers and parents can support literacy development by sharing their love of reading (Akrofi, Swafford, & Janisch, 2010).

Administrative collaboration and support is another effective strategy to assist classroom teachers with struggling readers. Parkay, Anctil, and Hass (2009) believe that “teachers and principals must be creative, systematic thinkers and learners, and collaborative leaders” (p. 307).

Teaching is a complex profession. Teaching struggling readers adds additional complexity. Effective teachers improve their instructional practices by embracing opportunities for continued teacher development throughout his or her career (Glickman, Gordon, & Ross-Gordon, 2009). Teachers take initiatives to try different reading intervention strategies, work diligently to learn the individual strengths and personal interests of each child. Effective teachers provide a safe and comfortable learning environment to all learners. Linek, Sampson, Raine, Klakamp, and Smith (2006) argued that “that teaching is never comfortable; perhaps if it [teaching] ever got comfortable we would cease being effective” (p. 205).

Administrative Support and Professional Development

Classroom teachers are unable to support the needs of students alone, especially students struggling to learn how to read. Amazing things can transpire when teachers and administration work together (Parkay et al., 2009). Administrative support offers great benefit to classroom teachers. Kouzes and Posner (2012) stated that “leadership is not simply about your own

values. It's also about the values of your constituents" (p. 57). School leadership is critical to the success of student achievement. According to Leithwood, Seashore Louis, Anderson, and Wahlstrom (2004), "it is second only to teaching among school-related factors that impact student achievement" (p. 5).

To be a leader with regards to literacy, a principal must deliberately show active support (Taylor, 2004). A true literacy leader must go out of his or her way to be available to teachers. He or she needs to foster an open communicative relationship with staff. True literacy leaders actively seek out opportunities to lead, they do not passively wait for supportive opportunities.

Taylor (2004) stated that "literacy leaders collaboratively develop daily literacy non-negotiables so everyone has a clear understanding of what is expected" (p. 27). These non-negotiables are consistently communicated with staff. They are shared at staff meetings and are shared with new staff upon hire. These expected literacy non-negotiables are emulated through the instructional practices of the classroom teachers.

A major hurdle with administrative leadership is that not all principals are equipped with a high-quality literacy background to help develop a literacy program within a district (Dowell et al., 2012). McCormick (1979) argued:

Because of the necessity for administrators to be generalists rather than specialists in the curriculum area, many principals express concern at their lack of the in-depth knowledge in the area of reading needed to judge teachers fairly and to spot weaknesses in programs that should be corrected. (p. 130)

Overholt and Szabocsik (2013) believed that:

Principals who have a deep understanding of literacy can better recognize and support excellent literacy teaching. With their deeper knowledge, they know what to look for when they observe literacy lessons: in particular, they have concrete expectations for what students who are learning effectively should be doing. They have a better idea

about what resources are needed to support effective instruction, and they provide collaborative conversation grounded in the concrete realities of teaching reading that supports the improvement of practice. They connect with teachers and the core work of teaching and learning. (p. 57)

When an administrator lacks a background in literacy, it is difficult for staff to view him or her as a literacy leader. Duffy (2005) stated that “responding effectively to the increasingly complex demands placed on school systems requires change leadership to transform entire school systems, not pieces of the school system” (p. 15).

Developing a level of trust between principals and classroom teachers helps support the belief that an administrator can be an effective teacher. For administrators to serve as instructional role models, they must be viewed as effective teachers (Mackey, Pitcher, & Decman, 2006; Manning & Manning, 1994).

Literacy leadership is inclusive to the fact that administration must be visible, not only to staff, but also to parents and students. Spending time in classrooms listening to students discuss reading and writing is a characteristic of a true literacy leader (Taylor, 2004). As a literacy leader, administration must model the same literacy commitment that is expected from classroom teachers and the community (Kral, 2012; Taylor, 2004). Principals should work alongside teachers during professional reflection to improve literacy because this involvement conveys the importance of making literacy a priority (Taylor, 2004). Reeves (2008) argued that “if leaders expect consistent literacy opportunities for students, then they must be willing to describe what effective literacy instruction is and to provide opportunities for teachers to engage in extended observations of effective instruction” (p. 92). True literacy leaders are saturating themselves with research, intervention methods, professional development, conversations with staff, and, most importantly, are passionate about spending a plethora of time in the classroom working with

students and teachers. Although principals of the 21st century are expected to function in a multitude of leadership roles, the principal's main responsibility is enhancing student achievement by facilitating effective teaching (DuFour, 2015; Sanzo et al., 2011).

Administrative support is a key component in successful literacy programs. Dowell et al. (2012) believed that schools that have successful literacy programs that are focused on supporting teachers and setting attainable goals, also have strong administrative leadership. These programs are successful because the teachers believe in the leadership of the administration and the administration believes in the ability of the teachers. Principals and teachers work as a team to collaborate, problem solve, to increase student achievement, and to lessen literacy achievement gaps.

As Hall and Simeral (2008) stated:

We contend that the real work of school administrators is not done in the office, at a desk, in front of a computer. Rather, it's done where the action is: where the students are learning and where the teachers are teaching-in the classrooms, in the hallways, and in the supply closets that have been converted into teaching nooks. (p. 125)

Massey (2012) suggested that "principals impact learning when they foster a climate of collaboration and communication (Supovitz, Sirinides, & May, 2010)" (p. 66). Encouraging collaboration among teaching staff and participating in these collaborative efforts contribute to a school culture that is working toward a common goal of student success. Principals can encourage a collaborative working environment by encouraging staff to learn from one another and to engage in peer observations. Principals can provide opportunities and classroom coverage for staff to conduct peer observations. Most importantly, administration should provide time for discussion and reflection after a teacher's performance evaluation. Working in a collaborative working environment built on trust and mutual respect empowers teachers to increase personal

expectations and expectations of the students. Effective leadership depends on collaboration between the principal and other instructional leaders as they discuss the academic needs of the building (Massey, 2012).

Mackey et al. (2006) described “achievement outcomes can be predicted based on teachers and principals’ perceptions of instructional leadership” (p. 40).

Mackey et al. (2006) suggested:

Principals who are viewed as effective instructional leaders within their schools use a broad-based approach for teachers’ growth and reflection and the principals themselves ‘embrace the challenges of growing and changing’ (p. 370), conceive of teachers not as technicians but as intellectuals, and, above all else, talk freely and openly with teachers about instruction (Blase & Blase, 1999). (p. 40)

Mackey et al. (2006) believed that “effective elementary instructional leaders engaged in various strategies designed to balance power inequities in their school community. They exemplified the use of collaborative power based on trust, respect, and collegiality (Harcher & Hyle, 1996)” (p. 40). Supporting previous researchers, Kral (2012) stated that “as instructional leaders, administrators should be seen doing the work they expect others to do. By modeling continuous learning, by walking the talk and by spreading enthusiasm, principals can re-energize their schools” (p. 2). Mackey et al. (2006) identified

three concepts that enable an elementary school principal to influence the school reading program and student test scores are: (1) the vision of the principal; (2) the educational background of the principal; and (3) the principal’s role as an instructional leader. (p. 39)

Mackey et al. (2006) believed:

In schools where at-risk students are achieving success, principals: (1) support teacher’s instructional methods, (2) allocate resources and materials; (3) make frequent visits to classrooms for instructional purposes; (4) solicit and provide feedback on instructional methods and techniques; and (5) use data to focus attention on improving the curriculum or instructional approach (Mendez-Morse, 1991). (p. 40)

Teaching a student how to read requires the assistance of all support staff and administration in a building.

Sanzo et al. (2011) stated:

Principals with personal action-orientated core beliefs about how students can best be served in the area of reading facilitates student success. They serve as instructional leaders and are catalysts for student achievement in reading by: personalizing reading instruction to the needs of their individual schools and students; encouraging a balanced approach to reading instruction requiring that remedial instruction be supplemental to classroom instruction whenever possible so that time spent on reading in the classroom is preserved; allowing for the flexible grouping of students for reading instruction and insisting on collective responsibility; taking responsibility for data collection; shaping successful reading instruction with minimal funding, and establishing home and community connections (Sherman and Crum, 2006). (p. 6)

Supportive administration is helpful to teachers in all areas of the profession, but especially while problem-solving for struggling readers. As the instructional leader, the principal must execute strong collaboration and communication skills with the teacher. Kouzes and Posner (2012) stated that “it is the work of leaders to inspire people to do things differently, to struggle against uncertain odds, and to persevere toward a misty image of a better future” (p. 1).

Teachers cannot do it alone. Teachers need to have the support of the instructional leader of the building, the principal. Administration must provide instructional leadership, but also provide opportunities for staff development. During staff development, administration needs to be present and focused on providing ways to increase student achievement and allow time for teachers to collaboratively work together to increase student achievement. Parkay et al. (2009) stated:

In order to build capacity for instructional knowledge and delivery, which ultimately will positively affect student achievement, there must be a system in place for ongoing training of effective, standards-based instructional planning, standards-based delivery, and standards-based assessment. (p. 306)

The review of literature illustrated the following themes: (a) research-based characteristics of struggling readers in preschool through second grade, (b) barriers faced by classroom teachers while instructing struggling readers, (c) successful literacy strategies and interventions employed by classroom teachers in assisting struggling readers, and (d) classroom support through collaboration with administrative staff and professional development. Teaching students to read is a crucial skill. Dickinson and Neuman (2007) asserted that “today, more than ever before, early childhood literacy is regarded as the single best investment for enabling children to develop skills that will likely benefit them for a lifetime” (p. 1).

Children who struggle to read may have difficulties with some or all aspects of the literacy process at any time throughout their literacy development (Bomer & Bomer, 2001). Zimmerman, Padak, and Rasinski (as cited in Dowell et al., 2012) suggested that knowing how to read establishes the foundation for successful school experiences.

Classroom teachers are unable to support the needs of all students without help. Sanzo, et al. (2011) stated:

While school principals in the 21st century are expected to fill a multitude of roles, the primary responsibility of today’s principal is to facilitate effective teaching and learning with an overall objective of enhancing student achievement (Boscardin, 2005; McLeod, D’Amico, & Protheroe, 2003). (p. 2)

Duffy (2005) stated that “responding effectively to the increasingly complex demands placed on school systems requires change leadership to transform entire school systems, not pieces of the school system” (p. 15).

The literature review revealed that there was not one way to define a struggling reader. The term can vary greatly from student to student, from teacher to teacher, and from school to school.

Chapter III: Methodology

Background Information to the Study

The purpose of the study focused on examining the perceptions of a select sample of primary level rural Minnesota teachers regarding the common reading deficiencies displayed by struggling preschool through second grade readers. In addition, the study focused on barriers the teachers experienced in delivering reading instruction to struggling readers, and strategies determined to be most effective, by classroom teachers, in addressing reading deficiencies displayed by struggling readers. Furthermore, the study focused on examining staff development topics identified as most valuable by rural Minnesota teachers and their principals to address reading deficiencies among preschool through second grade students.

Learning to read is a complex process that requires time to practice not only to build fluency, but also to build confidence as a reader. Updike and Freeze (2001) asserted that “literacy can be considered the most functional skill in society” (p. 15). Mahdavi and Tensfeldt (2013) stated that “the ability to read is an important precondition for much of what makes a person successful in modern life” (p. 77).

A Brief Overview of the Literature Related to Struggling Readers

Not all children who begin school are developmentally prepared to learn foundational pre-reading skills. Ravitch (2013) stated that “in homes with adequate resources, children get advantages that enable them to arrive in school . . . ready to learn” (p. 6).

Children who struggle to read may have difficulties with some or all aspects of the literacy process. Bomer and Bomer (2001) believed that “anyone can struggle, and no one struggles all the time” (p. 89). Some children struggle with decoding, some children struggle

with fluency, while other children struggle with comprehension. Zimmerman, Padak, and Rasinski (as cited in Dowell, Bickmore, and Hoewing, 2012) suggested that “knowing how to read establishes the foundation for successful school experiences” (p. 8).

Classroom teachers are unable to support the needs of all students without help. Sanzo et al. (2011) stated that “while school principals in the 21st century are expected to fill a multitude of roles, the primary responsibility of today’s principal is to facilitate effective teaching and learning with an overall objective of enhancing student achievement (Boscardin, 2005; McLeod, D’Amico, & Protheroe, 2003)” (p. 2). Duffy (2005) stated that “responding effectively to the increasingly complex demands placed on school systems requires change leadership to transform entire school systems, not pieces of the school system” (p. 15).

The literature review revealed that there was not one way to define a struggling reader. The term can vary greatly from student to student, from teacher to teacher, and from school to school.

Statement of the Problem

The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act required that all public school students make adequate yearly progress in reading; ultimately obtaining 100% literacy proficiency (Yell et al., 2006).

Moats (1999) implied that, in primary classrooms, preschool through second grade, a large number of children struggle to acquire developmentally appropriate pre-reading skills when she stated that “about 20% of elementary students nationwide have significant problems learning to read” (p. 7). She further stated that “at least 20% of elementary students do not read fluently enough to enjoy or engage in independent reading” (p. 7). According to Bos et al. (2001),

“approximately 75% of the children who struggle with reading in third grade will still be poor readers at the end of high school” (p. 98).

Johnson and Keier (2010) implied that because each struggling reader can encounter difficulties with one or more developmentally appropriate pre-reading skill, classroom teachers are challenged to identify research-based intervention strategies that have been proven to be successful in primary level classrooms when they stated that “we must remain responsive to the needs of each child, making sure we are linking what they already know to new learning” (p. 110).

According to Kelly and Campbell (2008), the four most common reasons children struggle with reading include (a) lack of life experiences and role models, b) difficulty with phonics and comprehension, (c) visual processing issues, and (d) learning disabilities.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study focused on examining the perceptions of a select sample of primary level rural Minnesota teachers regarding common reading deficiencies displayed by struggling preschool through second grade readers.

Kelly and Campbell (2008) defined struggling readers as “readers who display reading skills deficiencies because of lack of life experiences, lack of role models, difficulty with phonics and comprehension, visual processing issues, or learning disabilities” (p. 1).

In addition, the study focused on identifying barriers participating teachers experienced in delivering reading instruction to struggling readers, and identifying strategies participating teachers determined to be most effective in addressing reading deficiencies displayed by struggling readers. Finally, the study focused on examining the types of staff development topics

Minnesota teachers and their principals identified as most valuable in addressing reading deficiencies displayed by preschool through second grade readers.

The results of the study are intended to aid school district administrators and university professors in the future training and development of teachers and principals, expanding their knowledge about reading intervention strategies.

Research Questions

The following research questions were central to the study:

1. What did a select sample of rural Minnesota primary level school teachers identify as reading deficiencies displayed by struggling PreK-2 students?
2. What teaching barriers did a select sample of rural Minnesota primary level school teachers experience in delivering reading instruction to struggling PreK-2 students?
3. What teaching strategies did a select sample of rural Minnesota primary level school teachers identify as most effective in addressing reading deficiencies displayed by struggling PreK-2 students?
4. What types of professional development strategies did a select sample of rural PreK-2 Minnesota primary level school teachers and their principals identify as most valuable in assisting primary level teachers in addressing reading deficiencies experienced by struggling students?

Research Design

The study employed a mixed methodology which included the use of a closed-ended response survey and interviews. According to Morse (2005), “mixed method research consists of designs that are either primarily qualitative or quantitative and that incorporate strategies of the

other method (either qualitative or quantitative) into the same research project” (p. 583). The study participants were limited to a sampling of preschool through second-grade teachers and their principals in select rural Minnesota school districts, results are not to be generalizable to teachers and principals serving in other Minnesota school districts and school districts in other states.

A closed-ended survey was used to gather the perceptions and experiences of the teachers in the study. According to Check and Schutt (2011), “when explicit response categories are offered, we call it a closed-ended question” (p. 168). Closed-ended questions were selected for the survey to ensure consistency in the responses and to allow for the use of statistical methods to analyze the results. The use of closed-ended questions enabled data to be treated statistically. As a follow up to the closed-ended survey, semi-structured interviews were conducted with a subset of the participants. According to Wilson (2012):

Semi-structured interviews allow for more flexibility. They involve having a set of guiding questions that will keep the interview on track. However, the researcher can follow topics of interest during the interview without having to adhere to a structured set of question. (p. 96)

The use of closed-ended questions enabled the participants to complete the study survey in a timely manner. The researcher established responses from which participants could choose. Having predetermined choices ensured participant efficiency when completing the study survey. A final question on the survey asked respondents to express their willingness to participate in a semi-structured interview conducted by the researcher. Subsequently, the researcher contacted a subset of the participants who had expressed a willingness to be further interviewed.

Participants

Participants in the study were preschool through second-grade teachers and their principals in select rural Minnesota school districts. The sample group was selected using homogeneous sampling. Homogeneous sampling, according to Onwuegbuzie and Collins (2007), involves, “choosing settings, groups, and/or individuals based on similar or specific characteristics” (p. 285). The homogeneous nature of the sample group is derived from the fact that all participants were practicing rural Minnesota elementary school teachers in grades preschool through second grade, grade levels in which an instructional focus is literacy. The participants were most accessible in this convenience sample group (Marshall, 1996).

The sample group was purposefully comprised of area preschool through second-grade teachers and their principals, employed by rural central Minnesota school districts located within one hour driving distance of the researcher’s location. All preschool through second-grade teachers who currently teach reading, and their principals were asked to participate in the study and, if willing to do so, complete the study survey.

The researcher developed an informational and recruitment message that described the nature and purpose of the study, the informed consent provision, researcher contact information, and the link to the online survey. The information and recruitment message was distributed to a select group of preschool through second-grade teachers and their principals’ in rural Minnesota school districts who met the following criteria:

- Practicing preschool through second-grade teachers in central Minnesota school districts located within one hour driving distance of the researcher’s location.

- Preschool through second-grade teachers responsible for reading instruction for preschool through second grade students in those school districts.
- Principals and assistant principals in rural central Minnesota school districts located within one hour driving distance from the researcher's location.

Human Subjects Approval

Once the research committee approved the study proposal, the researcher completed and submitted the required application to the St. Cloud State University Institutional Review Board (IRB). In the application, the researcher described the exact details, the ethical implications, and the procedures that insured protection of the study participants and the data gathered during and following the study. The application was submitted to the IRB for its consideration, feedback, and decision. If issues arose related to the study during the application process, the researcher made those revisions required to protect the study participants and secure IRB approval. Upon receiving approval from the IRB, the study was initiated.

Instrument Design

A survey was developed to gather data related to the research questions of the study. The survey was designed using the information extracted in the literature related to literacy instruction in preschool through second grade classrooms. Once the initial survey was developed, the instrument was field tested with a cohort of St. Cloud State University educational leadership doctoral students who reviewed the survey questions, the closed-ended response choices, the format of the survey, and the semi-structured interview questions. The group of doctoral students provided feedback and suggestions for refinement of the instrument. Subsequently, the

researcher incorporated the feedback from the cohort of doctoral students in refining the instrument.

Once the instrument was finalized, it was uploaded and transformed into an online survey on the Survey Monkey website. Survey Monkey is an electronic survey administration tool that delivers surveys to participants and permits their online completion. A link was generated for participants to use in accessing the study survey. Other survey parameters such as the time the survey remained open, the number of times one computer could access the survey, and other survey parameters were programmed into the survey administration operations.

Procedures for Data Collection and Analysis

Once the study's informational and recruitment messages, the statement of consent, and the survey link was distributed to study participants, the Survey Monkey site automatically collected participants' responses. Study participants received their first email invitation to participate on April 15, 2016. The invitation contained researcher contact information, the statement of consent, and the link to the survey. The researcher was able to monitor the return of completed surveys. A return rate of 60% or greater was desired from the sample group. Approximately two weeks after the initial survey information was delivered to the sample group, a follow-up message to the sample group encouraging those who had not yet completed and returned their surveys to do so was sent. The researcher continued to monitor survey completions. A final reminder and encouragement message was sent to participants approximately four weeks after the first reminder, closing the survey on May 31, 2016.

The instrument "Teachers' Perceptions of Barriers, Strategies, and Professional Development in Addressing Reading Deficiencies Displayed by Struggling Pre-Kindergarten

Through Second Grade Readers” identified literacy teachers reported level of competency with specific indicators used to identify barriers and strategies to overcome reading deficiencies in pre-kindergarten through second grade classrooms. The instrument identified literacy teachers and their principals reported level of satisfaction with literacy professional development topics.

Section 1 required participants to answer closed-ended response questions regarding demographics and time spent teaching reading in their classroom. Participants who indicated that they were principals or assistant principals, were only required to complete the professional development question. The questions contained within Section 1 of the survey instrument were:

1. Please indicate your position.
2. Please indicate the number of years you have been a reading teacher.
3. Which of the following represents the grade level in which you currently teach?
4. Please indicate how many minutes per day you teach reading.

Section 2 consisted of six rank ordered close-ended response questions regarding the participants’ perceived barriers, strategies, deficiencies, and professional development topics in regards to literacy instruction. Principals and assistant principals were allowed to skip classroom specific survey questions and were directed to one of the final questions on literacy professional development. At the conclusion of the survey, participants had the opportunity to volunteer to be interviewed by the researcher. The questions contained within Section 2 of the survey instrument were:

1. Please rate the frequency with which the following deficiencies are displayed by struggling readers in your class.

2. Please rate how much you believe the following barriers impact your ability to deliver quality instruction (teaching) to struggling readers in your class.
3. Please rate the value of the following teaching strategies to you in addressing reading deficiencies experienced by struggling readers.
4. Please rate the value of the following professional development trainings to you in addressing reading deficiencies experienced by struggling readers.
5. What types of professional development, or related reading strategies, do you feel are most valuable in improving literacy instruction? Please choose three.
6. The researcher will conduct a limited number of follow-up interviews regarding this survey. If you are willing to be interviewed, please indicate your name and telephone number below.

Data collection method. Data collection began April 15, 2016 and was completed on May 31, 2016. The researcher contacted St. Cloud State University's Statistical Consulting and Research Center on a weekly basis to evaluate participant response rate. The researcher asked the Statistical Consulting and Research Center graduate assistant to monitor completion rate and to send weekly reminders to participants who had not completed the survey. On May 31, 2016, the researcher had 43 elementary school teachers and four elementary principals respond for a total of 47 participants, or a response rate of 23.7%.

Data analysis. The data analysis procedures used the results from the preschool through second grade survey instrument. Survey Monkey was the tool used to collect data. Data were downloaded into Excel spreadsheets. Data were imported into the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), where it was analyzed.

Assumptions of the Study

Roberts (2010) defined assumptions as, “what you take for granted relative to your study” (p. 139). The following list is comprised of assumptions made by the researcher in conducting the mixed method study:

- Study participants answered the questions honestly and without reservation.
- Study participants understood the meaning of the term, “struggling reader.”
- Responses received from participants accurately reflected their professional opinions.
- The convenience sample studied was not representative of the total population of preschool through second-grade teachers and their principals in Minnesota.

Summary

The study employed a mixed method survey followed by closed-ended interviews of willing participants. The survey consisted of ten items divided into two survey sections. The first section of the survey contained questions about the participants’ demographics. The second section of the survey gathered participants’ ratings on quality indicators in reading development and rank-ordered those indicators based upon the personal experiences of the study participants.

An internet-based program, Survey Monkey, served as the platform for the survey. The program allowed the study participants to access the survey at their leisure. The program compiled the participants’ responses to completed surveys for data analysis.

The target population for the survey was select central Minnesota public school reading teachers in grades preschool through second grade and their principals. Each participant in the target population received notification of the research and was extended an opportunity to participate in the mixed-method survey and the closed-ended interview.

In Chapter IV of the dissertation, the results that were obtained in data collection were described and reported. The data addressed each of the four research questions. The results assisted in identification of reading deficiencies displayed by struggling preschool through second grade readers, barriers experienced by teachers in addressing reading deficiencies, effective strategies in addressing reading deficiencies, and literacy training needs for preschool through second-grade teachers.

Chapter IV: Results

The purpose of the study was focused on examining perceptions of a sample of primary level rural Minnesota teachers of the common reading deficiencies displayed by struggling preschool through second grade readers, barriers experienced in delivering reading instruction to struggling readers, and strategies determined to be most effective in addressing reading deficiencies displayed by struggling readers. Furthermore, the study examined the types of staff development Minnesota teachers and their principals identified as most valuable in addressing reading deficiencies among preschool through second grade students. The results of the study are intended to aid school district administrators and university professors in the future training and development of teachers and principals, expanding their knowledge about reading intervention strategies.

Research Methods

The study employed a mixed methodology which included the use of a closed-ended response survey and interviews. According to Morse (2005), “mixed method research consists of designs that are either primarily qualitative or quantitative and that incorporate strategies of the other method (either qualitative or quantitative) into the same research project” (p. 583). Since the study participants were limited to a sampling of preschool through second-grade teachers and their principals in select rural Minnesota school districts, results were not believed to be generalizable to all teachers and principals serving in other Minnesota school districts and school districts in other states.

A closed-ended survey was used to gather the perceptions and experiences of the teachers in the study. According to Check and Schutt (2011), “when explicit response categories are offered, we call it a closed-ended question” (p. 168). Closed-ended questions were selected for

the study survey to ensure consistency in participants' responses and to allow the use of statistical methods to analyze the results. The use of closed-ended questions enabled data to be treated statistically. As a follow up to the closed-ended survey, semi-structured interviews were conducted with a subset of the participants. According to Wilson (2012):

Semi-structured interviews allow for more flexibility. They involve having a set of guiding questions that will keep the interview on track. However, the researcher can follow topics of interest during the interview without having to adhere to a structured set of question. (p. 96)

The use of closed-ended questions enabled the participants to complete the study survey in a timely manner. The researcher established question responses from which participants could choose. Having predetermined choices ensured participant efficiency when completing the survey. A final question on the survey asked respondents to express their willingness to participate in a semi-structured interview conducted by the researcher. Subsequently, the researcher contacted five study participants who had expressed a willingness to be further interviewed.

The chapter reports the findings of the study. The data were analyzed and findings organized to match each research question. The study was governed by the following questions.

1. What did a select sample of rural Minnesota primary level school teachers identify as reading deficiencies displayed by struggling PreK-2 students?
2. What teaching barriers did a select sample of rural Minnesota primary level school teachers experience in delivering reading instruction to struggling PreK-2 students?
3. What teaching strategies did a select sample of rural Minnesota primary level school teachers identify as most effective in addressing reading deficiencies displayed by struggling PreK-2 students?

4. What types of professional development strategies did a select sample of rural PreK-2 Minnesota primary level school teachers and their principals identify as most valuable in assisting primary level teachers in addressing reading deficiencies experienced by struggling students?

Analysis

Analysis of the data was undertaken using the Statistical Package of Social Sciences (SPSS). To answer Research Question 1, participants were asked to rate the frequency with which each of nine deficiencies were displayed by struggling readers in their classrooms. To calculate a rank order of the deficiencies, a ranking of the means relating to question five on the survey instrument was conducted. In Research Question 2, participants were asked to rate the impact of each of the ten barriers on quality instruction for struggling readers. In Research Question 3, participants were asked to rate the value of each of the ten teaching strategies in assisting struggling readers. For Research Question 4, the participants were asked to rate the value of 13 professional development topics in addressing reading deficiencies experienced by struggling readers. For each research question, the researcher provided an open-ended text box for the participants to provide responses that were not listed by the researcher.

Description of the Sample

The study sample contained a potential 216 preschool through second-grade teachers and their principals employed in rural Minnesota school districts. Teachers and principals were invited to participate in the study through an email message distributed by St. Cloud State University's Statistical Consulting and Research Center. Initially, the study survey was designed

to be open to participants to respond for two weeks. However, due to an initial low response rate, the researcher extended the time span for participants to respond to six weeks.

Of the 216 potential participants, 12 emails from these potential participants were returned to the Statistical Consulting and Research Center as undeliverable, and six participants opted out of surveys generated from St. Cloud State University, resulting in 198 potential participants in the study. Of the 198 potential participants, 47 chose to participate in the study. Of the participants, 43 were preschool through second-grade teachers and four were principals and/or assistant principals, a response rate of 23.73%.

Demographics

The survey was designed to answer the four research questions developed by the researcher. Demographic information was requested in the first four questions of the survey instrument.

Participant demographic information included position, years as a reading teacher, current grade level, and the number of minutes per day devoted to reading instruction by participants.

Table 1

Demographics of Participants

Demographic	N	%
Position		
Teacher	43	91.49
Principal/Assistant Principal	4	8.51
Years' Experience as a Reading Teacher		
0-10	20	46.51
11+	23	53.49
Grade Level		
Pre-Kindergarten (Preschool)-Kindergarten	13	69.77
First Grade-Second Grade	30	69.77
Total Minutes of Reading Instruction (per day)		
0-90	14	32.56
91+	29	67.44

Survey participants were comprised of 43 teachers (91.49%) and four principals and/or assistant principals (8.51%). Slightly less than half of the respondents (46.51%; $n = 20$) reported 0-10 years of experience as a reading teacher, while 23 or 53.49% cited experience as greater than ten years.

Grade level demographics revealed that 30.23% ($n = 13$) of the teacher participants taught preschool and kindergarten, while 69.77% ($n = 30$) taught first and second grade. Fourteen participants (32.56%), engage in reading instruction for 0-90 minutes per day, while 29 participants (67.44%) cited teaching reading instruction for 91 or more minutes per day.

Research Question 1

What did a select sample of rural Minnesota primary level school teachers identify as reading deficiencies displayed by struggling PreK-2 students? Table 2 data describe the frequency with which teacher respondents identified deficiencies displayed by struggling readers in their classrooms.

The study participants chose an indicator (never, rarely, sometimes, always) to rank each deficiency provided by the researcher. To analyze the responses of the participants, a ranking of the means was conducted.

Table data present the mean scores of each of the deficiencies presented in the study. A low mean value indicated that the study participants did not rate a deficiency as frequently displayed by struggling readers in their classrooms.

Table 2

Teachers' Reported Reading Deficiencies Displayed by Struggling Readers

Item	N	R	S	A	M
Displays lack of fluency or fluency is inconsistent.	0	2	19	22	3.47
Inability to decode (chunk) words into individual sounds.	0	0	29	14	3.33
Struggle to blend sounds into words.	0	1	31	11	3.23
Does not consistently use context clues to help decode difficult words.	0	3	27	13	3.23
Does not comprehend what is read.	0	3	28	12	3.21
Displays avoidance of reading (e.g., finds reasons to do something other than the reading task).	0	5	30	8	3.07
Uses only the first letter of the word to guess entire word.	0	5	31	7	3.05
Inability to consistently relate sounds to letters.	0	11	26	6	2.88
Inability to recognize letters of the alphabet.	7	18	13	5	2.37

Note: N = never, R = rarely, S = sometimes, A = always, M = Mean

Teacher respondents reported the greatest deficiency displayed by struggling readers as “displaying lack of fluency or fluency is inconsistent” (n = 43, M = 3.47). The subsequent three greatest deficiencies reported by respondents were “inability to decode (chunk) words into individual sounds” (n = 43, M = 3.33), “struggle to blend sounds into words” (n = 43, M = 3.23), and “does not consistently use context clues to help decode difficult words” (n = 43, M = 3.23).

Teacher respondents reported the lowest rated deficiency displayed by struggling readers as “inability to recognize letters of the alphabet” ($n = 43$, $M = 2.37$). Teacher respondents also reported low rated deficiencies in four additional skills: “does not comprehend what is read” ($n = 43$, $M = 3.21$), “displays avoidance of reading (e.g. finds reasons to do something other than the reading task)” ($n = 43$, $M = 3.07$), “uses only the first letter of the word to guess entire word” ($n = 43$, $M = 3.05$), and “inability to consistently relate sounds to letters” ($n = 43$, $M = 2.88$).

Although the study indicated a low teacher rated deficiency for “displays avoidance of reading (e.g. finds reasons to do something other than the reading task) ($M = 3.07$); Interview Respondent 5, a 13-year veteran, found, “. . . more success with struggling readers if they are engaged in reading books often in the classroom . . .” Therefore, implying that it is essential to keep struggling readers consistently engaged in reading books.

Interview Respondent 4, a 17-year veteran teacher, reiterated the importance of engaging struggling readers in books they enjoy by encouraging students to choose good fit books of high interest instead of indicating which book the struggling student must read.

In summary, teachers reported that the highest rated deficiencies displayed by struggling readers were lack of fluency or inconsistent fluency, an inability to decode (chunk) words into individual sounds, struggle to blend sounds into words, and inconsistently using context clues to help decode difficult words.

Research Question 2

What teaching barriers did a select sample of rural Minnesota primary level school teachers experience in delivering reading instruction to struggling PreK-2 students?

Table 3 presents the mean scores for each of the barriers presented in the study based on the recoded responses. A low mean score indicates that the barrier did not impact the teacher's ability to deliver quality instruction to struggling readers in their classrooms.

The study participants were asked to choose an indicator (1 = not applicable, 5 = moderate impact, 7 = great impact) to express the degree to which each barrier impacted his or her ability to deliver quality instruction to struggling readers. Given the small participant size ($n = 43$) and the range of indicators (1-7), the results were re-coded. If the participant chose one (not applicable) or two, the barrier was recoded as having no to low impact. If the participant chose three, four, or five (moderate impact), the barrier was recoded as having a moderate impact. If the participant chose six or seven (great impact) it was recoded as having a high impact. To analyze the responses of the participants, a ranking of the means was conducted.

Table 3

Teachers' Reported Belief of How the Provided Barrier Impacts Instruction

Item	Not too Low	M	H	Mean
Parents not involved in their child's education or supportive of the school.	1	12	30	2.67
Large class size.	10	14	19	2.21
Student avoidance of the task of reading.	9	20	14	2.12
Lack of time to evaluate student data (to make data-based decisions regarding instruction).	8	27	8	2.00
Lack of additional resources for the diverse needs of your classroom (i.e., leveled texts, manipulatives, books on tape, support staff, etc.).	18	15	10	1.81
Lack of or inadequate preservice training in the area of literacy (reading).	15	21	7	1.81
Lack of common preparation time with grade level teams (to problem solve, collaborate, communicate, etc.).	18	19	6	1.72
Clustering struggling readers into one classroom.	21	15	7	1.67
Lack of administrative support (e.g., not providing common planning times for grade levels, not providing adequate reading curriculum, etc.).	22	15	6	1.63
Inadequate reading curriculum.	22	16	5	1.60

Not to Low (1/2) = no to low impact, M (3 - 5) = moderate impact, H (6/7) = high impact

Teachers reported the greatest barrier to providing quality instruction to struggling readers was that parents were not involved in their child's education or supportive of the school ($n = 43$, $M = 2.67$). The next three greatest barriers reported by teachers were "large class size" ($n = 43$, $M = 2.21$), "student avoidance of the task of reading" ($n = 43$, $M = 2.12$), and "lack of time to evaluate student data (to make data-based decisions regarding instruction)" ($n = 43$, $M = 2.00$).

Interview Respondent 3, a fourth-year teacher, has witnessed the effect class size has on student achievement. Interview Respondent 3 continued, "with fewer students you can give each

student more small-group or one-on-one time, so even though the day does not get longer the student instructional time goes up.”

Interview Respondent 2, a third-year teacher, reported that the most significant barrier in teaching struggling students to read is “time.” Time as a significant barrier to teaching struggling students was reiterated by Interview Respondent 3 who stated: “From my experience time is the greatest barrier in teaching struggling students to read. I often find great ideas to help these students, but do not have the time to implement them.”

Responding teachers reported the least significant barrier to providing quality instruction to struggling students was “inadequate reading curriculum” ($n = 43$, $M = 1.60$). Teachers also reported lesser barriers to providing quality reading instruction as follows: “lack of additional resources for the diverse needs of your classroom (i.e., leveled texts, manipulatives, books on tape, support staff, etc.)” ($n = 43$, $M = 1.81$), “lack of or inadequate pre-service training the area of literacy (reading)” ($n = 43$, $M = 1.81$), “lack of common preparation time with grade level teams (to problem solve, collaborate, communicate, etc.)” ($n = 43$, $M = 1.72$), “clustering struggling readers into one classroom” ($n = 43$, $M = 1.67$), and “lack of administrative support (e.g. not providing common planning times for grade levels, not providing adequate reading curriculum, etc.)” ($n = 43$, $M = 1.63$).

Surprisingly in the study, “lack of common preparation time with grade level teams (to problem solve, collaborate, communicate, etc.) was reported as an insignificant barrier to teaching struggling students to read ($M = 1.72$), however, during follow-up interviews with a subset of the respondents, all four teacher interview participants indicated that “time to

collaborate with grade level team” was a professional development, or related reading strategy, that they felt most valuable in improving literacy instruction.

In summary, responding teachers reported the greatest barriers to providing quality instruction to struggling readers was that parents were not sufficiently involved in their child’s education or supportive of the school, large class sizes, student avoidance of the task of reading and lack of time to evaluate student data (to make data-based decisions regarding instruction).

Research Question 3

What teaching strategies did a select sample of rural Minnesota primary level school teachers identify as most effective in addressing reading deficiencies displayed by struggling PreK-2 students?

Table 4 data illustrate the effective values of select teaching strategies in addressing reading deficiencies displayed by struggling preschool through second grade students.

The study participants were asked to choose an indicator (never, rarely, somewhat, always) to rate the value of each teaching strategy provided by the researcher. To analyze the responses of the participants, a ranking of the means was conducted.

Table 4 presents the mean scores of each of the researcher provided teaching strategies. A low mean score indicates that the teaching strategy was not identified as effective by the teacher respondents.

Table 4

Teachers' Reported Values of Teaching Strategies

Item	N	R	S	A	M
Early identification of struggling readers.	0	0	7	36	3.84
Differentiated instruction within classroom.	0	0	8	35	3.81
Using individual student data to guide reading instruction	0	1	9	33	3.74
Adequate and available resources.	0	1	13	29	3.65
Teachers belief in the struggling reader.	0	4	9	30	3.60
Maintaining a shared literacy vision with colleagues and administration.	0	2	16	25	3.53
Research-based instructional methods.	0	2	16	25	3.53
Receiving professional development opportunities specifically focused on reading instruction.	0	1	20	22	3.49
Introducing text to students in real-life examples.	0	4	15	24	3.47
School provides more opportunities for parent education.	0	4	21	18	3.33

N = never, R = rarely, S = somewhat, A = always, M = Mean

Teachers reported the most effective teaching strategy for addressing reading deficiencies experienced by struggling readers as “early identification of struggling readers” ($n = 43$, $M = 3.84$). The subsequent three most effective strategies reported by teachers for addressing reading deficiencies experienced by struggling readers were “differentiated instruction within classroom” ($n = 43$, $M = 3.81$), “using individual student data to guide reading instruction” ($n = 43$, $M = 3.74$), and “adequate and available resources” ($n = 43$, $M = 3.65$).

Strategies that Interview Respondent 2 believed to be most effective for addressing reading deficiencies experienced by struggling readers are as follows: meeting with struggling readers daily and using a direct phonics instruction approach to build student abilities. The direct phonics instruction was believed to increase struggling students' ability to sound out words and

subsequently increased their fluency. Interview Respondent 3 believes that small group instruction has assisted in the classroom with struggling readers, stating, “. . . the problem then comes with students who are missing skills from earlier, or students who are working at a slower pace. With small group instruction, you can fill in those gaps, and help students continue to grow their skills.”

Teachers reported the least effective teaching strategy for addressing reading deficiencies experienced by struggling readers was the school providing more opportunities for parent education ($n = 43$, $M = 3.33$). A comment provided by a study participant inferred that the parents who attend school for further parent education are not typically the parents who need the additional resources. This finding contradicted survey data reported in Table 3. “Parents not involved in their child’s education or supportive of the school” was reported as the greatest barrier to teachers to provide quality instruction to struggling students. Survey data indicated that 42 of 43 respondents or 97.67% believed that the lack of parental involvement or support provided a moderate to high impact on the ability of the teacher to provide quality instruction to struggling students.

Teachers reported five other moderately effective teaching strategies as follows: “teacher’s belief in the struggling reader” ($n = 43$, $M = 3.60$), “maintaining a shared literacy vision with colleagues and administration” ($n = 43$, $M = 3.53$), “research-based instructional methods” ($n = 43$, $M = 3.53$), “receiving professional development opportunities specifically focused on reading instruction” ($n = 43$, $M = 3.49$), and “introducing text to students in real-life examples” ($n = 43$, $M = 3.47$).

In an open text response to Research Question 3, those teaching strategies a select sample of rural Minnesota primary level school teachers identified as most effective in addressing reading deficiencies displayed by struggling PreK-2 students, survey participants indicated that teachers need additional time to plan for Special Education students in their classrooms, with focused resources provided, and more time to plan differentiated instruction.

Table data further revealed that 36 of 43 teacher respondents or 83.72% stated that “early identification of struggling readers” was “always” a valued teaching strategy. Differentiated instruction within the classroom was rated as “always” valued by 35 of 43 or 81.40% of teacher respondents.

In summary, teachers reported the most effective teaching strategies to providing quality instruction to struggling readers were: early identification of struggling readers, differentiating instruction in the classroom, and using individual student data to guide reading instruction.

Research Question 4

What types of professional development strategies did a select sample of rural PreK-2 Minnesota primary level school teachers and their principals identify as most valuable in assisting primary level teachers in addressing reading deficiencies experienced by struggling students?

The study participants chose three professional development or related reading strategy indicators believed to be most valuable in improving literacy instruction from a list of researcher provided strategies. Table 5 provides the summary of responses from the teacher and the principal respondents. To analyze the responses, independent t-tests were used to compare the group means for each of the eight strategies. A t-test for independent means is a test that

examines two independent variables and determines if there is a difference (Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun, 1993). The dependent variable assessed whether or not a strategy was considered valuable in improving literacy instruction by the teacher or principal.

Table 5 illustrates the types of professional development strategies a select sample of primary level school teachers and their principals identified as most valuable in assisting primary level teachers in addressing reading deficiencies experienced by struggling readers. Table data present the mean scores of each of the strategies presented. A low mean score indicates that the strategy was not identified as a valuable professional development or related reading tool by the participants.

Table 5

Professional Development Strategies Most Valuable in Addressing Reading Deficiencies

Item	Teachers (n = 43)	Principals (n=4)	Sig.
Professional development on literacy instruction.	.53	.50	.896
Additional lesson planning time (if possible).	.37	.00	.000
Time to collaborate with grade level team.	.60	.25	.177
Time for Professional Learning Communities (PLC's).	.21	.75	.017
Increased pre-service literacy (reading) training for new staff.	.23	.25	.939
Common planning time with grade level.	.21	.00	.002
Professional development on student assessment.	.19	.00	.003
Professional development on data-based decision making.	.21	.75	.017

Teachers reported the most valuable professional development strategy to address reading deficiencies experienced by struggling readers was having “time to collaborate with grade level team” (M = .60). Interview Respondent 3 agreed:

I have always felt the need to collaborate with my grade level team. Sometimes the best teachers are in the next room, and all we need is to be in communication with them. As a grade level you are experiencing many of the same struggles and challenges. Learning how another person is dealing with their struggles can make all the difference in your own classroom.

The subsequent three most valuable strategies reported by teachers were “professional development on literacy instruction” ($M = .53$), “additional lesson planning time (if possible)” ($M = .37$), and “increase preservice literacy (reading) training for new staff” ($M = .23$). Consistent with the data, Interview Respondent 2 stated: “I have learned the most about literacy instruction by observing and collaborating with my grade level team. They have been able to share ideas and experiences with me that have proven to be effective in my classroom.”

Interview Respondent 2 stated that a professional development workshop on Daily 5 impacted struggling readers in the classroom because it provided a behavior management tool to manage other students in the classroom while the teacher can remain focused and intentional on the struggling readers in a small group. However, Interview Respondent 2 indicated the need to have more opportunities to observe colleagues instructing struggling readers.

Teachers reported the least valuable professional development strategy to address reading deficiencies experienced by a struggling reader as “professional development on student assessment” ($M = .19$). Teachers also reported moderately valuable professional development strategies as follows: “time for Professional Learning Communities (PLC’s)” ($M = .21$), “common planning time with grade level” ($M = .21$), and “professional development on data-based decision making” ($M = .21$).

Principals reported the most valuable professional development strategies to address reading deficiencies experienced by a struggling reader as “time for Professional Learning Communities (PLC’s)” ($M = .75$) and “professional development on data-based decision

making” ($M = .75$). The subsequent three most valuable strategies reported by principals were “professional development on literacy instruction” ($M = .50$), “time to collaborate with grade level team” ($M = .25$), and “increase preservice literacy (reading) training for new staff” ($M = .25$).

Interview Respondent 1, a rural Minnesota principal with 17 years’ experience, stated that the most valuable professional development, or related reading strategies in improving literacy instruction was “time for professional learning communities if they are effective.” The subsequent most valuable strategies reported by interview respondent one included “professional development on literacy instruction that needs to be embedded and on-going to be most effective, which is a challenge to facilitate, and professional development on student assessment.” Interview Respondent 1 further indicated, that as a principal, it was a priority to facilitate effective professional learning communities that focus on instructional strategies and assessment.

Principals reported the least valuable professional development strategies in addressing reading deficiencies experienced by a struggling reader as “additional lesson planning time (if possible)” ($M = .00$), “common planning time with grade level” ($M = .00$), and “professional development on student assessment” ($M = .00$).

Significant differences between teachers and principals are illustrated in Table 5. Teachers rated the following strategies significantly more valuable than principals: “additional lesson planning time (if possible),” “common planning time with grade level,” and “professional development on student assessment.” Principals rated the following strategies significantly more valuable than teachers: “time for Professional Learning Communities (PLC’s)” and “professional

development on data-based decision making.” Reynolds, Wheldall, and Madelaine (2010) noted that “while educators generally accept that a focus on preventing learning failure is desirable, there is less agreement about the most efficient way to carry this out” (p. 172).

In summary, teachers reported the three most valuable professional development strategies to address reading deficiencies experienced by a struggling reader as follows: time to collaborate with grade level team, professional development on literacy instruction, and additional lesson planning time (if possible). Principals reported the three most valuable professional development strategies to address reading deficiencies experienced by a struggling reader as: time for Professional Learning Communities (PLC’s), professional development on data-based decision making, and professional development on literacy instruction.

Significant differences between teachers and principals are illustrated. Teachers rated the following strategies significantly more valuable than principals: “additional lesson planning time (if possible),” “common planning time with grade level,” and “professional development on student assessment.” Principals rated the following strategies significantly more valuable than teachers: “time for Professional Learning Communities (PLC’s)” and “professional development on data-based decision making.”

Summary

Data from 43 preschool through second grade primary level teachers and four elementary principals in rural Minnesota schools were analyzed to identify deficiencies displayed by struggling readers, perceived barriers impacting the delivery of quality instruction, teaching strategies to address reading deficiencies of struggling readers, and professional development or

related reading strategies to improve literacy instruction. Analysis of variance calculations and statistically significant relationships were determined.

Chapter IV summarizes the findings of the study, related findings to the current review of literature, and conclusions about suggested methods for supporting primary level teachers and their principals in addressing the literacy needs of struggling preschool through second grade readers.

Chapter V: Summary, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of the study was to examine the perceptions of a sample of primary level rural Minnesota teachers regarding the common reading deficiencies displayed by struggling preschool through second grade readers, barriers experienced in delivering reading instruction to struggling readers, and strategies that were most effective in addressing reading deficiencies displayed by struggling readers. Furthermore, the study was focused on determining the types of staff development Minnesota teachers and their principals identified as most valuable for addressing reading deficiencies among struggling preschool through second grade readers. The results of the study are intended to assist school district administrators and university professors in designing future training and development programs for principals to help expand their knowledge about literacy and literacy intervention strategies.

Chapter V summarizes the findings of the study. The data were analyzed and organized by research question. The study's research questions were as follows:

1. What did a select sample of rural Minnesota primary level school teachers identify as reading deficiencies displayed by struggling PreK-2 students?
2. What teaching barriers did a select sample of rural Minnesota primary level school teachers experience in delivering reading instruction to struggling PreK-2 students?
3. What teaching strategies did a select sample of rural Minnesota primary level school teachers identify as most effective in addressing reading deficiencies displayed by struggling PreK-2 students?
4. What types of professional development strategies did a select sample of rural PreK-2 Minnesota primary level school teachers and their principals identify as most valuable

in assisting primary level teachers in addressing reading deficiencies experienced by struggling students?

Potential participants in the study were 216 Prekindergarten-second-grade teachers and their principals. Of the 216 possible respondents, 12 emails from potential participants were returned to the Statistical Consulting and Research Center as undeliverable, and six participants opted out of surveys generated from St. Cloud State University, resulting in 198 potential participants in the study. Of the 198 potential participants, 47 chose to participate in the study or a 23.7% response rate. Teachers and principals who elected to participate in the study were asked to complete the survey, “Teachers’ Perceptions of Barriers, Strategies, and Professional Development in Addressing Reading Deficiencies Displayed by Struggling Pre-Kindergarten - Second Grade Readers.”

Analysis of the data was undertaken using the Statistical Package of Social Sciences (SPSS). In analyzing Research Questions 1, 2, and 3, data rankings of the mean were conducted. With Research Question 4, the data were analyzed using a t-test for independent means.

The chapter reports the summary, conclusions, and recommendations drawn from the study.

Delimitations of the Study

Delimitations are the boundaries of the study controlled by the researcher (Roberts, 2010). The delimitations of the study included:

- The researcher selected the time of year in which the study could be conducted.

- The researcher utilized a sample of convenience, selecting teachers and principals employed in school districts located within one hour driving distance from the researcher's location.
- The researcher selected as study participants active Minnesota preschool through second grade literacy teachers and their principals.

Research Question 1

What did a select sample of rural Minnesota primary level school teachers identify as reading deficiencies displayed by struggling PreK-2 students?

Struggling readers are those “who display reading skill deficiencies because of lack of life experiences, lack of role models, difficulty with phonics and comprehension, visual processing issues, or learning disabilities” (Kelly & Campbell, 2008, p. 1).

Study participants reported the greatest deficiency displayed by struggling readers was a lack of fluency or inconsistent fluency when reading. The study confirmed the findings of Mather et al., (2001), when children struggle to read fluently, they have difficulty comprehending what is read.

Study respondents reported the lowest deficiency displayed by struggling readers was the inability to recognize letters of the alphabet.

Research Question 2

What teaching barriers did a select sample of rural Minnesota primary level school teachers experience in delivering reading instruction to struggling PreK-2 students?

Parents not involved in their child's education or supportive of the school was reported as the greatest teaching barrier by responding rural Minnesota primary level school teachers. This

finding was supported by Darling-Hammond (2010) when she asserted that “teachers in the United States have a difficult job because, in addition to educating youth, they are assisting families with meals, constant home evictions, loss or inadequate health care, and untreated mental illnesses” (p. 33).

Interview Respondent 1, a rural Minnesota principal with 17 years of experience, did not believe the lack of parental involvement impacted the teacher’s ability to provide high quality instruction, and, further, believed that it [lack of parent involvement] impacts a student’s chance of achieving at a high level. The comments of interview respondent one supported the beliefs of Interview Respondent 5, a 13-year veteran teacher, that teachers of children without literacy rich backgrounds are spending much of their teaching time attempting to “catch up” students to similar levels of their peers as the achievement gap continues to increase.

Massey (2012) affirmed that, to increase achievement in student literacy, a strong connection between home and school must be maintained.

Responding teachers reported the smallest barrier to delivering quality instruction to struggling readers as inadequate reading curriculum.

Research Question 3

What teaching strategies did a select sample of rural Minnesota primary level school teachers identify as most effective in addressing reading deficiencies displayed by struggling PreK-2 students?

Study participants cited that the most effective teaching strategy for addressing reading deficiencies displayed by struggling readers was the early identification of those students. This confirmed the research of Kemps et al. (as cited in Reynolds et al., 2010) when they stated:

“accurate and timely identification of students who are beginning to struggle in reading is a key component of a preventative approach” (p. 185).

The least effective teaching strategy in addressing reading deficiencies displayed by struggling PreK-second grade readers reported by responding rural Minnesota preschool through second-grade teachers was a lack of additional resources for parent education provided by the school.

Research Question 4

What types of professional development strategies did a select sample of rural PreK-2 Minnesota primary level school teachers and their principals identify as most valuable in assisting primary level teachers in addressing reading deficiencies experienced by struggling students?

Responding teachers reported their three most valuable professional development strategies were having time to collaborate with their grade level team, professional development on literacy instruction, and additional time to plan lessons.

Principal participants in the study stated that their three most valuable professional development strategies were increased time for Professional Learning Communities (PLC's), professional development time devoted to data-based decision making, and professional development on literacy instruction.

Responding teachers identified that their least valued professional development strategy to address reading deficiencies experienced by struggling readers was professional development on student assessment. The finding contradicted Powers et al. (2006) who believed that “effective teachers understand the interplay between instruction and assessment and consistently

plan instruction based on classroom assessment results (Afflerback & Moni, 1996; Hiebert & Calfee, 1989)” (p. 122).

Responding principals reported the least valued professional development strategy for addressing reading deficiencies experienced by a struggling reader was additional lesson planning time (if possible) for the classroom teacher.

Recommendations for Professional Practice

Based on the study findings and the conclusions from the data, the following recommendations are offered regarding barriers, strategies, and professional development addressing reading deficiencies displayed by struggling pre-kindergarten through second grade readers.

- It is recommended that university teacher preparation programs provide field experience opportunities for teacher candidates in diverse preschool through second grade classrooms. Those teacher candidates are encouraged to collaboratively work with the supervising classroom teachers during the reading intervention selection process, implementation of the reading intervention, and decision making process to determine the effectiveness of the reading intervention techniques.
- It is recommended that university administration preparation programs provide early literacy training, intervention selection indoctrination, and small group literacy experiences in preschool through second grade classrooms for all aspiring administrators.
- It is encouraged that school districts examine possibilities for increasing the scheduled time for teachers to collaborate with grade level teaching team members to

evaluate and interpret student data and to make data-based decisions regarding instructional changes, interventions, and student groupings.

- It is suggested that principals provide staff mentors-trained as literacy interventionists-to assist preschool through second-grade teachers in intervention selection for struggling readers.
- It is suggested that school districts identify and implement strategies that have promise for enhancing the involvement of the parents of struggling readers with the schools and their children's teachers.
- It is suggested that preschool through second-grade teachers provide to and advise parents on at home intervention reading strategies, particularly focused on the parents of struggling readers.
- It is encouraged that principals provide nontenured preschool through second-grade teachers with access to an experienced mentor teacher, at the same grade level, to assist with literacy development, intervention selection, and intervention effectiveness.

Recommendations for Further Study

Based on the research, study, and conclusions drawn from the data, the following recommendations are made for further research.

- The study examined teachers' perceptions on classroom barriers in delivering quality literacy instruction to struggling pre-kindergarten through second grade students in rural Minnesota elementary school settings. It is recommended that a broader, follow up study be conducted to examine classroom barriers in a sample of urban or

suburban elementary school districts in Minnesota. The findings of such a study could be compared to the data contained in the study and analyzed to determine similarities, differences, and needs for further study.

- A follow-up study could be conducted to determine whether or not strategies or interventions employed with struggling PreK-second grade readers differ in school districts in which free and reduced meal counts vary significantly (30%) from one another.
- A limitation of the study was the limited number of potential participants. A future study could be conducted using a larger number of participants.
- A limitation of the study was the small sample size of elementary principal and assistant principal participants. A future study could be conducted employing a larger number of participating elementary principals and assistant principals.

Conclusion

The purpose of the study focused on examining the perceptions of a sample of rural primary level Minnesota teachers regarding the reading deficiencies displayed by struggling preschool through second grade readers, barriers experienced in delivering quality reading instruction to those readers, and strategies determined to be most effective in addressing reading deficiencies displayed by struggling readers. Further, the study focused on examining types of staff development topics Minnesota teachers and their principals identified as most valuable for addressing reading deficiencies among preschool through second grade readers. Findings from the study suggest areas for further classroom intervention assistance, literacy specific

professional development, grade level mentorship programs, and additional classroom experiences for teacher candidates.

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Appendix A. Survey

Teachers' Perceptions of Barriers, Strategies, and Professional Development in Addressing Reading Deficiencies Displayed by Struggling Pre-Kindergarten-Second Grade Readers

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to determine from a sample of primary level rural Minnesota teachers and their principals their perceptions of the common characteristics displayed by struggling preschool through second grade students, barriers experienced in delivering literacy instruction to those struggling students, and strategies determined to be most effective in addressing reading problems displayed by those students.

Informed Consent for Participation in this Study

THE INFORMATION ON THIS PAGE IS REQUIRED TO INFORM YOU OF THE BACKGROUND, POTENTIAL RISKS, AND THE VOLUNTARY NATURE OF THIS SURVEY. BY CLICKING ON "NEXT" AND ANSWERING THE SURVEY QUESTIONS, YOU ARE AGREEING TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION AND PURPOSE

The purpose of this study was to determine from a sample of primary level Minnesota teachers their perceptions of the common characteristics displayed by struggling preschool through second grade students, barriers experienced in delivering literacy instruction to those students, and strategies determined to be most effective in addressing reading deficiencies displayed by those students.

PROCEDURES

If you decide to participate, you will be asked to complete an anonymous survey using the survey tool Survey Monkey. The survey will take approximately 10 minutes to complete. Your survey information will be analyzed as an aggregate group. Data will be presented in aggregate form or with no more than one or two descriptors presented together. Some of the data will be analyzed based on the various demographic information (grade level, job title, etc.). If you have questions on the procedures of the survey, contact the researcher, Melissa Tellinghuisen at Missy.Tellinghuisen@mlaca.k12.mn.us or 320-630-1129.

RISKS

There are no foreseeable risks associated with your participation in this study.

BENEFITS

The information obtained by this survey will add depth to the existing research related to students who struggle with reading. The study provides Minnesota preschool through second grade teachers the ability to provide their perceptions about working with struggling readers in the area of literacy instruction. The results of this study will then be available to individuals, school districts, principal organizations, superintendents, college professors, and government agencies to serve as a resource when addressing the topic of literacy.

CONFIDENTIALITY

This is an anonymous and confidential survey. No personally identifiable information will be gathered or stored. As was stated, only group responses will be reported. No information that could identify an individual will be reported.

RESEARCH RESULTS AND CONTACT INFORMATION

If you are interested in learning the results of the study, feel free to contact the researcher, Melissa Tellinghuisen, at Missy.Tellinghuisen@mliaa.k12.mn.us or 320-630-1129. The advisor for this study, Dr. Roger Womer of St. Cloud State University, can be reached at rbwomer@stcloudstate.edu or 612-719-5857.

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION/WITHDRAWAL

Participation in the study is voluntary. If you decide to complete the survey and there are any questions that you are not comfortable in answering, you do not need to answer them. Please remember that this information is designed to help determine the professional development needs for primary school teachers, working with struggling readers, related to literacy. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without penalty.

ACCEPTANCE TO PARTICIPATE

II. Informed Consent for Participation in this Study

Your completion of the survey indicates that you consent to participate in the study. Thank you.

* 1. I have read the above information and agree to participate in this survey.

☐ Yes

☐ No

Teachers' Perceptions of Barriers, Strategies, and Professional Development in Addressing Reading Deficiencies Displayed by Struggling Pre-Kindergarten-Second Grade Readers

* 2. Please indicate your position.

☐

Teacher

☐

Principal/Assistant Principal

Teachers' Perceptions of Barriers, Strategies, and Professional Development in Addressing Reading Deficiencies Displayed by Struggling Pre-Kindergarten-Second Grade Readers

* 3. Please indicate the number of years you have been a reading teacher.

- | | |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| <input type="radio"/> 0-5 | <input type="radio"/> 16-20 |
| <input type="radio"/> 6-10 | <input type="radio"/> 21-25 |
| <input type="radio"/> 11-15 | <input type="radio"/> 26+ |

* 4. Which of the following represents the grade level in which you currently teach?

- | | |
|--|------------------------------------|
| <input type="radio"/> Pre-Kindergarten (PreSchool) | <input type="radio"/> First Grade |
| <input type="radio"/> Kindergarten | <input type="radio"/> Second Grade |
| <input type="radio"/> Other (please specify) | |

* 5. Please indicate how many minutes per day you teach reading.

- | | |
|-----------------------------|------------------------------|
| <input type="radio"/> 0-30 | <input type="radio"/> 91-120 |
| <input type="radio"/> 31-60 | <input type="radio"/> 121+ |
| <input type="radio"/> 61-90 | |

Teachers' Perceptions of Barriers, Strategies, and Professional Development in Addressing Reading Deficiencies Displayed by Struggling Pre-Kindergarten-Second Grade Readers

* 6. Please rate the frequency with which the following deficiencies are displayed by struggling readers in your class.

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Always
Inability to recognize letters of the alphabet	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Inability to consistently relate sounds to letters	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Struggle to blend sounds into words	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Inability to decode (chunk) words into individual sounds	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Uses only the first letter of the word to guess entire word	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Does not consistently use context clues to help decode difficult words	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Displays lack of fluency or fluency is inconsistent	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Does not comprehend what is read	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Displays avoidance of reading (e.g. finds reasons to do something other than the reading task)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Other (please specify)

Teachers' Perceptions of Barriers, Strategies, and Professional Development in Addressing Reading Deficiencies Displayed by Struggling Pre-Kindergarten-Second Grade Readers

* 7. Please rate how much you believe the following barriers impact your ability to deliver quality instruction (teaching) to struggling readers in your class.

	Not Applicable 1	2	3	4	Moderate Impact 5	6	Great Impact 7
Lack of common preparation time with grade level teams (to problem solve, collaborate, communicate, etc)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Lack of time to evaluate student data (to make data based decisions regarding instruction)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Large class size	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Clustering struggling readers into one classroom	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Inadequate reading curriculum	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Lack of additional resources for the diverse needs of your classroom (i.e. leveled texts, manipulatives, books on tape, support staff, etc)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Student avoidance of the task of reading	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Parents not involved in their child's education or supportive of the school	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Lack of or inadequate preservice training in the area of literacy (reading)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Lack of administrative support (e.g. not providing common planning times for grade levels, not providing adequate reading curriculum, etc.)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Other (please specify)

Teachers' Perceptions of Barriers, Strategies, and Professional Development in Addressing Reading Deficiencies Displayed by Struggling Pre-Kindergarten-Second Grade Readers

* 8. Please rate the value of the following teaching strategies to you in addressing reading deficiencies experienced by struggling readers.

	Never	Rarely	Somewhat	Always
Early identification of struggling readers	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Differentiated instruction within classroom	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Maintaining a shared literacy vision with colleagues and administration	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Research-based instructional methods	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Adequate and available resources	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Introducing text to students in real life examples	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Teachers belief in the struggling reader	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Using individual student data to guide reading instruction	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Receiving professional development opportunities specifically focused on reading instruction	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
School provides more opportunities for parent education	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Other (please specify)

Teachers' Perceptions of Barriers, Strategies, and Professional Development in Addressing Reading Deficiencies Displayed by Struggling Pre-Kindergarten-Second Grade Readers

* 9. Please rate the value of the following professional development trainings to you in addressing reading deficiencies experienced by struggling readers.

	Unsure				Somewhat Valuable		Very Valuable
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Phonemic Awareness (differentiating between sounds)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Phonics Instruction (letter-sound correspondence)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Literacy (reading) Centers	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Interactive Read Alouds	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Daily 5 (Read to Self, Read to Someone, Work on Writing, Listen to Reading, Word Work)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Flexible Reading Groups (grouping students by ability for reading)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Management Techniques	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Comprehension Strategies	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Guided Reading	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Small Group Instruction	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Differentiated Instruction	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Data Based Decision Making	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Parent Involvement	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Other (please specify)

Teachers' Perceptions of Barriers, Strategies, and Professional Development in Addressing Reading Deficiencies Displayed by Struggling Pre-Kindergarten-Second Grade Readers

* 10. What types of professional development, or related reading strategies, do you feel are most valuable in improving literacy instruction? (Please choose three)

- ☐ Professional development on literacy instruction
- ☐ Additional lesson planning time (if possible)
- ☐ Time to collaborate with grade level team
- ☐ Time for Professional Learning Communities (PLC's)
- ☐ Increased pre-service literacy (reading) training for new staff
- ☐ Common planning time with grade level
- ☐ Professional development on student assessment
- ☐ Professional development on data based decision making
- ☐ Other (please specify)

Teachers' Perceptions of Barriers, Strategies, and Professional Development in Addressing Reading Deficiencies Displayed by Struggling Pre-Kindergarten-Second Grade Readers

The researcher will conduct a limited number of follow up interviews regarding this survey. If you are willing to be interviewed, please click on the link below.

[Interview Link](#)

To be entered into a drawing, please click on the link below.

[Drawing Link](#)

Thank you for your participation.

Appendix B: Request Letter to Preschool-Second-Grade Teachers and Principals

Dear Colleague:

My name is Melissa Tellinghuisen. I am a second-grade teacher at Milaca Elementary School. While at Milaca Elementary, I have taught in the Title One Program, the Kindergarten program, and am currently teaching second grade. In addition to my teaching in Milaca; I am a doctoral candidate in St. Cloud State University's Educational Administration and Leadership Doctoral Program and am in the process of conducting my dissertation.

I am researching a topic that is very dear to my heart—struggling readers! My dissertation topic is *Teachers' Perceptions of Barriers, Strategies, and Professional Development in Addressing Reading Deficiencies Displayed by Struggling Pre-Kindergarten-Second Grade Readers*.

As esteemed colleagues, I am asking for your assistance with my study by participating in the attached survey. This survey will take no more than 15 minutes to complete. The information is anonymous and no personally identifying information will be collected. You are free to withdraw from the survey at any time. The data that your responses will provide is invaluable. A copy of the study will be provided to each of the number of school districts participating in the study.

Thank you so much for your assistance.

Yours in education,

Melissa J. Tellinghuisen

Appendix C: Interview Questions

PURPOSE OF THE INTERVIEW

The purpose of this interview is to determine from a sample of primary level rural Minnesota teachers and their principals their perceptions of the common characteristics displayed by struggling preschool through second grade students, barriers experienced in delivering literacy instruction to those struggling readers, and strategies determined to be most effective in addressing reading problems displayed by those students.

INFORMED CONSENT FOR PARTICIPATION IN THIS INTERVIEW

The information on this page is required to inform you of the background, potential risks, and the voluntary nature of this interview. By providing your name and phone number, you are agreeing to participate in this interview.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION AND PURPOSE

The purpose of this interview was to determine from a sample of primary level Minnesota teachers their perceptions of the common characteristics displayed by struggling preschool through second grade students, barriers experienced in delivering literacy instruction to those students, and strategies determined to be most effective in addressing reading deficiencies displayed by those students.

PROCEDURES

If you decide to participate, you will be asked interview questions regarding your teaching experience. The interview will take approximately 15 minutes to complete. Your interview information will be used as supporting evidence. Some of the data will be analyzed based on the various demographic information (grade level, job title, etc.). If you have questions on the procedures of the interview, contact the researcher, Melissa Tellinghuisen at Missy.Tellinghuisen@milaca.k12.mn.us or 320-630-1129.

RISKS

There are no foreseeable risks associated with your participation in this interview.

BENEFITS

The information obtained by this interview will add depth to the existing research related to students who struggle with reading. The interview provides Minnesota preschool through second-grade teachers the ability to provide their perceptions about working with struggling readers in the area of literacy instruction. The results of this interview will then be available to individuals, school districts, principal organizations, superintendents, college professors, and government agencies to serve as a resource when addressing the topic of literacy.

COMPENSATION

There is no monetary compensation per participant.

CONFIDENTIALITY

This is an anonymous and confidential survey. No personally identifiable information will be gathered or stored. Individuals will be identified through an aggregated identification process with no more than two descriptors (participants may be labeled as FT1 for the first female teacher, MP2 for the second male principal, etc.). Direct quotations from individual interviews may also be used and will be de-identified with aggregate data. No information that could identify an individual will be reported.

RESEARCH RESULTS AND CONTACT INFORMATION

If you are interested in learning the results of the interview, feel free to contact the researcher, Melissa Tellinghuisen, at Missy.Tellinghuisen@milaca.k12.mn.us or 320-630-1129. The advisor for this study, Dr. Roger Worner of St. Cloud State University, can be reached at rbworner@stcloudstate.edu or 612-719-5857.

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION/WITHDRAWAL

Participation in the interview is voluntary. If you decide to complete the interview and there are any questions that you are not comfortable in answering, you do not need to answer them. Please remember that this information is designed to help determine the professional development needs for primary school teachers, working with struggling readers, related to literacy. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without penalty.

ACCEPTANCE TO PARTICIPATE

II. Informed Consent for Participation in this Interview

Your completion of the interview indicates that you consent to participate in the interview. Thank you.

Follow-up Interview Questions

- Question 1: How long have you been a reading teacher?
- Question 2: Please name the most significant barrier in teaching struggling students to read.
- What strategies have helped you overcome this barrier?
 - What resource(s) would assist you further with this barrier?
- Question 3: Please name a strategy that has assisted you with struggling readers.
- How has this strategy been helpful?
- Question 4: Has there been a professional development workshop and/or in-service that you have attended that has impacted your teaching in regard to teaching struggling readers?
- Specifically, how has this workshop/in-service impacted your teaching?
- Question 5: What professional development opportunities would you like to see offered to assist you teaching struggling readers?
- Question 6: What types of professional development, or related reading strategies, do you feel are most valuable in improving literacy instruction? Please choose three.
- Professional development on literacy instruction
 - Additional lesson planning time (if possible)
 - Time to collaborate with grade level team
 - Time for Professional Learning Communities (PLC's)
 - Increased pre-service literacy (reading) training for new staff
 - Common planning time with grade level
 - Professional development on student assessment
 - Professional development on data-based decision making
- Question 7: Based on the answer to above question, tell me more. What is your priority?

Principal Question: What types of professional development, or related reading strategies, do you feel are most valuable in improving literacy instruction? Please choose three.

- Professional development on literacy instruction
- Additional lesson planning time (if possible)
- Time to collaborate with grade level team
- Time for Professional Learning Communities (PLC's)
- Increased pre-service literacy (reading) training for new staff

- Common planning time with grade level
- Professional development on student assessment
- Professional development on data-based decision making

Principal Question: Based on the answer to above question, tell me more. What is your priority?